

AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON UNTOUCHABILITY

By Sunil Xess

INTRODUCTION

Untouchability is one of the major problems of our country. It has its roots in the Indian society that is based on the caste system. The castes are further divided into sub-castes. The people of the lowest caste are treated untouchables. They do not belong to the fold of Hinduism. Nobody knows exactly about the origin of untouchability or the caste system itself. Some historians try to trace the origin of the caste system to the *Vedas*, the ancient religious books of the Hindus. The *Purusa Sukta* in the *Rig Veda* describes the creation of four *Vernas* namely, the *Brahmin*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaishya* and the *Shudra*. The indigenous people were outside the *Verna* system. They continued to fight against the invading Aryans. But they were subjugated in the long run.

In order to preserve the purity of blood, social interaction was prohibited with the members of the vanquished group. Those who did not follow the rule or violated it were forced to live away from the dominating group. Such people became outcastes and later untouchables. An attempt is made in this paper to present Ambedkar's view on untouchability.

Ambedkar was one of the most remarkable leaders who played a major role in Indian politics, especially for the upliftment of the downtrodden. He was a distinguished economist, a learned and a brilliant lawyer, an author, a great political leader and champion of human rights and dignity. But above all, he left the mark as to how one could attain the highest glory through self-help and self-respect. He was born on 14th, April 1891 in an untouchable community known as Mahar at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh. He was the fourteenth child in the family. His father Ramji Maloji Sakpal was a Subedar Major in the Army. Educated at Satara and Bombay, he took his name *Ambavadekar* from his native village.

He was awarded a Baroda State scholarship in 1913. Maharaja Sayaji of Baroda sent Bima Rao to Columbia University in 1913 for higher studies. Two years

later he took his M.A. degree in economics with a dissertation on *Ancient Indian Commerce*. He obtained doctorate from the same University.

In 1916 Ambedkar moved to the London school of Economics. A year later, he had to discontinue his studies owing to financial exigencies. He taught at Sydenham College of Commerce, Bombay. In 1920 he resumed his studies in London and obtained M. Sc. and D. Sc. degrees in 1921 and 1923 respectively. Later on, his D.Sc. thesis was published under the title *The Problem of the Rupee*. On returning home in June 1924 Ambedkar started legal practice at the Bombay High Court. This was the beginning of an active public career where he served as social worker, politician writer, and educationist. The same year he founded *Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sadha*, (association for the welfare of the Depressed Classes) in Bombay for the moral and material progress of the untouchables. In 1927 he started a Marathi fortnightly *Bahishkrit Bharat* and in December 1930 the *Janata* a weekly.

In December 1927 Ambedkar led a Satyagraha to establish the civic rights of the untouchables to draw water from a public tank *Chavdar Talen* at Mahar, in Kolaba district. Three years later in 1930, he led another Satyagraha to establish the untouchable's right to enter the famous temple of Kalaram at Nasik.

Besides his leadership of the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar's eminence as a jurist began to be widely recognized. In 1928 he was appointed professor at Government Law College Bombay and subsequently its principal. Seven years later in 1935 he was offered the coveted Perry Professorship of Jurisprudence.

Ambedkar felt that freedom struggle led by the Congress party was a movement for power rather than for freedom. The cause of the freedom was not the genuine cause of the untouchables. Therefore, he refused to join the freedom movement. But he co-operated and worked for the political rights of the people. He maintained two main principles of equality and the removal of casteism, in order to remove untouchability. All people are born equal and have to continue to remain as equals till death.

He dedicated his entire life for the upliftment of the untouchables, the downtrodden, and the oppressed, who were treated by the caste Hindus as sub-humans. He wrote several books, for example *Annihilation of Caste*, *Gandhiji and Emancipation of the Untouchables*, *Who Are the Shudras* and his *Writings and Speeches* that are published in several volumes. His main aim was to arise

consciousness among the untouchables. These books are a great help to know more about the practice of untouchability in our country

Ambedkar questioned the traditional social order of the Hindu society in order to build a just and an egalitarian society. This reflects his deep commitment to humans. Thus his philosophy revolves around the welfare of humans through social and political means.

As the architect of constitution, he wanted to arm the untouchables with proper political rights, education, and cultural conditions. He struggled almost forty years to restore their human rights and to give them a respectable place in the society. He was looking for an ideal society that could recognize and understand sufferings and miseries of the oppressed. He dreamed to have a society in which common people, especially the untouchables would be free from all social evils.

I took this topic for my dissertation because the life style of Ambedkar made a deep impression on me. As a student of 3rd standard, I had a similar experience as Ambedkar had. Due to some land dispute in the family, most of the villagers were against my family. The villages segregated my family. As a small boy, I was segregated by the rest of the students. I went to school all alone. My family members encouraged me. This continued for at least four years. I often experienced loneliness and I had bitter feeling in me.

I had a bad experience in the village named Karondavera in Jharhkand. I drew water from a bucket and started drinking. A lady came and started to scold me. Later on I asked the reason of her scolding. The people of that area told me that my drinking had made the water impure. This experience remains powerful in me even today. There are many people who are going through similar kinds of experiences. For such people the philosophy of Ambedkar brings hope and meaning.

This dissertation includes five chapters. The first chapter deals with the meaning and origin of the untouchability in general. The second chapter deals with the revolts of the untouchables against injustice. The third chapter consists of Ambedkar's analysis of the origin of the untouchability. The fourth chapter deals with some of the problems of the untouchables and the last chapter deals with the means for emancipation of the untouchables.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF UNTOUCHABILITY

1.1 What is Untouchability?

Untouchability means pollution by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth in a particular caste or family. It leads to defilement, pollution and contamination. It is believed that the practice of untouchability is peculiar to the Hindu society. Untouchability as a social concept has become embodied in customs and as customs differ so does untouchability. The classes, which are commonly regarded, as untouchables are Chamars, Busadh, Dom, Halalkor, Hari, Mochi, Mushahar. Although they were outside the pole of Hindu society, which recognizes only four classes namely, *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*, they were reckoned as part of the Hindu society for political purposes.¹ Before the Indian constitution that abolished untouchability in 1950, the untouchables were divided into three categories namely untouchables, unapproachable and unseeable.

The untouchables had different names in different parts of the country. They were called outcaste untouchables namely *Pariahs*, *Panchamas*, *Atishudras*, *Avarnas*, *Antyajas* and *Namashudras*. Their touch and even voice were deemed by the caste Hindus to be polluting. So they had to clear the way at the approach of a caste Hindu.²

According to the traditional terminology, the caste Hindus are called *Savarnas* and the untouchables are called *Avarnas*.³ There is difference between an untouchable and an impure person. An untouchable's touch pollutes anyone but an impure's touch pollutes only the Brahmins. The touch of the impure causes pollution only on the ceremonial occasion, whereas that of the untouchable causes pollution at all times.

1.2 The Hindu Social Structure

The Hindu social structure is based on the theory of *Chaturvarna* that divides the Hindu society into four parts namely, *Brhamanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The system of *Chaturvarna* limits the opportunities a person can have for

¹ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5 (Maharashtra: Education department, 1990), 114.

earning an honorable living.⁴ The Hindus call their caste *Verna*, i.e. colors. Caste is based on birth while *Verna* is based on three *gunas* namely, *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. According to the caste Hindus, the four castes came from different parts of the Brahman. The highest castes are the Brahmins of whom the books of the Hindus tell that they were created from the head of Brahman. They study and teach the *Vedas*. In Hindu society they are considered the best of humankind. The next caste is the *Kshatriyas*, who were created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. *Kshatriyas* protect the creatures created by God. The *Vaishyas* were created from the thigh of Brahman. They are expected to meet the material needs of the community. The *Shudras* were created from the Brahman's feet and they are supposed to serve all other groups. Between the latter two classes there is no great distance. However, these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages.⁵

The people who came after the *Shudras* are called *Antyaja*. They are namely shoemakers, jugglers, the basket and shield makers, the sailors, fishermen, the hunters of wild animals and of birds, and the weavers. They are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. They render various kinds of services to the caste Hindus. The four caste Hindus do not live together with them in one place.⁶

The people called Hadi, Doma, Candala and Badhatau (sic) are not reckoned amongst any caste. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact they are considered like illegitimate children. According to general opinion they descend from a *Shudra* father and a Brahmani mother as the children of fornication. Therefore, they are degraded outcastes. The Hindus give every single man of the four castes characteristic names, according to their occupations and modes of life.⁷ Hence, the basic conception of the Hindu social organization starts with the rise of four classes or *Vernas*.

The practice of the caste system, which refuses to recognize all human beings equal, is very strong in India. It will be clear from the following description. To each

⁴ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Verna a proper duty is assigned to prevent social dissolution. It is believed that *Dharma* for every individual is determined by his origin, because the nature of every person is originally determined. If the people who are meant for servitude were allowed to give it up, then there would be no servants left to perform their functions. The *Shudras* will begin to rule. Since, they are unfit to rule there is a danger that this social order would be completely destroyed. They thoroughly believed that castes, and *Vernas* are natural things associated invariably with specific qualities. A *Shudra* cannot be of noble quality because his nature is servitude. If there be any doubt regarding the *Verna* of any individual it would at once be revealed by his nature or by actions which are due to his nature.⁸

It is important to note why one man should be compelled to be a servant and another man to a Brahmin all his life. It is a sheer injustice to say that it was because his father was a servant or a Brahmin.

Those who believed in the theory of *Karma*, the theory of *gunas*, and transmigration of soul will disagree with it. They apply these theories to justify the whole system. According to them, *Karma* causes the various positions and conditions of people namely, the highest, the middle, and the lowest. In consequence of many sinful acts committed by one's body, voice or mind an individual in the next birth would become a bird, a beast, or a low caste person respectively. There are three *gunas*: (qualities) *satva* (goodness), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (darkness). When one of these three qualities predominates, the body becomes distinguished by that quality. The study of *Vedas*, austerity, knowledge, and purity, etc., is mark of the quality of goodness. Delighting in adventure, want of firmness, indulgences in sexual pleasure are marks of the quality of activity. Cruelty, covetousness, evil life etc., are marks of the dark quality.⁹

Through each of these qualities people obtain various transmigrations. It is preponderance of various qualities that determine the birth of man as a Brahmin or a *Shudra*. Those who commit sins go into inferior existence or wombs, those who do good actions pass into superior wombs. And those who lead an ideal life obtain

⁸ S. V. Ketkar, *History of Caste in India* (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1990), 113.

⁹ Ibid.

cessation of birth and death. Thus, they held that the *Verna* order is ordained for justice and human betterment.¹⁰

1.3 The Origin of Untouchability

Untouchability originated in India around A. D. 400 and it arose out of the struggle for supremacy between *Buddhism* and *Brahmanism* and it has molded the history of India.¹¹ Untouchability is the word used by Ambedkar himself for those lowest castes in the Hindu scale of pollution. During the pre-independence era the term *Depressed Classes* was used to denote the untouchables. This was replaced by Scheduled castes in 1935 when these castes were placed on a Schedule as qualifying for special right. Gandhiji's name for the untouchables, *Harijan*, dates from his 1933-34 campaign against untouchability and is in general usage except among Ambedkar's followers.¹²

The origin of untouchability is an enigma. But it is generally held that it is a perverted outcome of the caste system. The Vedic Aryans knew no caste system. As time went on, the Aryans divided themselves for different occupations of labour and according to aptitude, liking and the capacity of the individual. Those who took to learning were called Brahmins, those who undertook governance were classified as *Kshatriyas*, those who resorted to trade were termed *Vaishyas*, and those who served the forgoing three classes were known as *Shudras*. Brahmins continued to be regarded as someone next to God whereas a man from the lowest class, as a *Shudra*. The result was that the original four divisions became watertight compartments and degenerated later into the present caste system. In this way the four *Varnas* came to stay as four castes.¹³

Henceforth, different professions, barriers of provinces, varying ways of living, different superstitions, and customs broke up the main four castes and further led to the creation of various sub-castes. The untouchables were from the lowest strata of the Hindu society and were condemned as untouchables by the caste Hindus down the century.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹¹ Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchables to Dalit* (New Delhi: Manohar Publication, 2001), 74.

¹² Ibid., 74.

¹³ Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

1.4 Theories of the Origin of the Untouchability

According to Mr. Stanley Rice there are two theories of the origin of the untouchables

1.4.1 Occupational Origin of Untouchability

According to Mr. Rice, the origin of untouchability is to be found in the unclean and filthy occupations of the untouchables. This theory is very plausible one. But there are certain difficulties in the way of its being accepted as a true explanation of the origin of untouchability. These filthy and unclean occupations, which the untouchables perform, are common to all human societies. In every human society there are people who perform these occupations. It is important to note that such people were not treated as untouchables in other parts of the world. We do not have proper evidence to know it.¹⁵

We have proof about the Aryans that shows that the Aryans were like other people, and their notions of purity and impurity did not fundamentally differ from those of other ancient people.

According to the theory there are two sorts of occupations namely pure work and impure work. We are familiar in our day-to-day lives that impure work is done by slaves, e.g. sweeping the gateway, the road and the place for rubbish, gathering and putting away the left over food and urine. On the other hand, laborers do pure work. It is important to know who the slaves were. Stanley Rice says that slavery existed among the Aryans. And these Aryans could be a slave of an Aryan. No matter to what *Verna* an Aryan belonged he could be a slave. A *Kshatriya* could be a slave and even *Vaishya* could be slave. A Brahmin was not immune from the law of slavery. It is when *Chaturvarna* came to be recognized as a law that a change was made in the system of slavery.¹⁶ This change can be seen from the following extract from the *Narada Smriti*: “In the inverse order of the caste, slavery is not ordained, except when a man violated the duties peculiar to his caste. Slavery is analogous to the condition of a wife.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7 (Maharashtra; Education Department 1990), 305.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The change was a mere reorganization of slavery and the basis of the principles of graded inequality that is the soul of *Chaturvarna*. To put it in a concrete form, the new law declared that a Brahmin could have a Brahmin, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and a *Shudra* as his slave. A *Kshatriya* could have *Kshatriya*, a *Vaishya* and a *Shudra* as his slave. In the same way a *Vaishya* could have a *Vaishya* and a *Shudra* as his slave. A *Shudra* could have a *Shudra* only. Thus, the law of slavery remained and all Aryans whether they were *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* or *Shudras* they could be made slaves.¹⁸

This change in the law of slavery did not make any difference regarding the duties prescribed for the slaves. This means that if a Brahmin, *Kshatriya* or *Vaishya* was a slave, he had to do the work of a scavenger. Only a Brahmin did not do scavenging in the house of a *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* or a *Shudra*. But he would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin. Similarly a *Kshatriya* would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin and the *Kshatriya*. He would not do it only in the house of a *Vaishya* or *Shudra*. A *Vaishya* would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*. He would not do it only in the house of a *Shudra*. It is, therefore, obvious that all the four castes who are admittedly the Aryans did the work of scavenging which is the filthiest of filthy occupations. The theory of filthy occupation as an explanation of untouchability is therefore, not tenable. If scavenging was not loathsome to Aryans how can it be said that engaging in filthy occupations was the cause of untouchability.¹⁹

1.4.2 Racial Origin of the Untouchability

The Racial theory of Mr. Stanley Rice contains two elements:

- (1) That the untouchables are non-Aryan, *non-Dravidian* aboriginals; and
- (11) That they were conquered and subjugated by the *Dravidians*.

These theories raise the whole question of the invasions of India by foreign invaders, the conquests made by them, and the social and cultural institutions that have come about. According to Rice, there have been two invasions of India namely the invasions of India by the *Dravidians* and Aryans. The Aryans conquered the *Dravidians* and made them *Shudras*. This theory is too mechanical, a mere

¹⁸ Ibid., 307.

¹⁹ Ibid.

speculation and too simple to explain a complicated set of facts relating to the origin of the *Shudras* and the untouchables.²⁰

In ancient Indian history, we often come across four races namely the Aryans, *Dravidians*, *Dasas* and *Nagas*. There is a general assumption that they are different races. Stanley Rice seeks to explain the social structure of the Hindu society, particularly its class basis. Let us know who the *Dravidians* and *Nagas* were. The word *Dravidia* is the name of the language of the people and does not denote the race of the people. In fact it was the language of the *Nagas* throughout India. The important thing to note here is the contact between the Aryans and the *Nagas* and the effect it produced on the *Nagas* and their language. The effect of this contact on the *Nagas* of North India was quite different from the effect it produced on the *Nagas* of South India. The *Nagas* in North India gave up *Dravidia* which was their mother tongue and adopted Sanskrit in its place.²¹ The *Nagas* in South India spoke Tamil (*Dravidia*) as their mother tongue and did not adopt Sanskrit, the language of the Aryans. It is important to note why the name *Dravidia* came to be applied only for the people of the South India. The reason is that the *Nagas* of North India ceased to speak the *Dravidia* language whereas only the *Nagas* of the South India kept speaking *Dravidia*. This is the real reason why the people of South India came to be called *Dravidians*. It is a fact that the terms *Dravidia* and *Nagas* are merely two different names for the same people. *Nagas* was a racial or cultural name and *Dravidia* was their linguistic name. Thus the *Dasas* are the same as the *Nagas* and *Nagas* are the same as the *Dravidians*.²² In other words, it can be said that there have been at the most only two races namely, the *Nagas* and the Aryans. The implication of this theory is that the *Dravidians* were conquered by the Aryans and were made untouchables.

1.5 Views of Gandhiji on Untouchability

Gandhiji helped the untouchables who were working independently for the upliftment of their own people. This was the period when the untouchables themselves were on a warpath. They too were engaged in offering their civic and social rights. This was the period during which the untouchables of Bombay Presidency had launched their Satyagraha at *Mahad* for establishing their right to take

²⁰ Ibid., 291.

²¹ Ibid., 300.

²² Ibid.

water from the public tank and at Nasik for establishing their right to enter a Hindu temple. How did Gandhi look upon this Satyagraha movement started by the untouchables against the caste Hindus? The attitude of Gandhiji, to say the least, was extremely queer.²³

In the first place Gandhiji condemned this Satyagraha started by the untouchables against the caste Hindus. He would not support it. In this controversy the untouchables were perfectly logical. They argued that the Civil Disobedience was the weapon advocated by Gandhiji to use legitimately against the British for securing their freedom. In the same manner, the untouchables must be allowed to use the same weapon against the caste Hindus for securing their emancipation. However good this logic be, Gandhiji could not bring it. He tried to meet their logic by his logic. He argued that untouchability was the sin of the Hindus. It is the Hindus who must, therefore, do penance. It is they who must start Satyagraha for the removal of untouchability. Satyagraha was not the business of the untouchables because they were not sinners of it.²⁴

Gandhiji showed two different attitudes regarding the Satyagrahas started by the untouchables against caste Hindus at Mahad and Nasik and at Vaikom. Gandhiji was in favor of the Satyagraha at Vaikom. He blessed it and encouraged it. The Vaikom Satyagraha was carried on by the untouchables under the auspices of the congress. The other two were launched by the untouchables independently of the congress. Gandhiji refused to give his blessings to the Satyagraha started by the untouchables. It was a foregone conclusion that no congressmen would or could come and help the untouchables in their struggle against the orthodox Hindus.²⁵ This was the mistake Gandhiji did by his most illogical attitude. He came out openly against all non-Hindus and prohibited them from helping the untouchables in their Satyagraha struggle against the cast Hindus. He was not only against Mohammedan, Christians, Parsis and Jews rendering any help, but he went to the length of objecting to the Sikhs who came to help the untouchables.²⁶

Gandhiji was questioned when he went to Dandi in March 1930 to make the historic Salt Satyagraha against the British law. Some untouchables went to Dandi

²³ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 306.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

and questioned him. They asked him regarding his declaration about the removal of untouchability. Gandhiji's reply was this: "The untouchables are a part of a whole. I am working for the whole and I therefore believe that I am therefore working for the untouchables who are a part of the whole."²⁷

Gandhiji considered India to be one nation, of which the congress was legitimate spokesperson. He worked hard to recognize the Muslims and Sikhs as separate entities and to grant their own representatives. He could not do much work for the *Dalits* for two basic reasons. First, it would create a division in Hinduism that he was not ready to look forward with any satisfaction whatsoever. Secondly, it would perpetuate rather than the removal of untouchability.

The Hindu social organization is based on four- fold caste system. The untouchables don't belong to any of these castes. They are the most unprivileged people in India. In the next chapter, we shall study how the untouchables revolted against the Hindu social structure.

²⁷ Qtd. in Ambedkar, 318.

CHAPTER 2

REVOLT AGAINST THE UNJUST HINDU SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2. 1 Ambedkar and his Experience of Untouchability

Ambedkar was brought up in the surrounding of an orthodox and rigid Hindu family that was divided on religious, casteist, communal, and regional lines. He complained that the Hindu society was just like a tower, which had several storeys without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storeys in which one was born.²⁸

There are several instances, which would show the kind of humiliation and injustice Ambedkar, being an untouchable, suffered in his early life. Once he and his nephews were going to meet his father at Goregoan in Satara district on a hot summer day. They had to disembark at Masur railway station and from there they had to go to Geregaon, which was at a far off distance. The two children sat on a bullock cart and started their journey. But as soon as the owner of the cart came to know that they were Mahars, they were ordered to get down from the cart. The children offered double fare. Since they were untouchables, the owner of the bullock cart did not take their money. In the scorching heat the children were denied food and even water though the cart had all the facilities to get these essentials in the course of the journey.²⁹ We can imagine what scars might have been left on the sensitive heart of a young, intelligent and precious child. Yet another shock was growing in the mind of Ambedkar. It was indeed a touching scene when he came to know that his hair defiled the purity of the barbar who regarded the shaving of a buffalo a better and holier affair than a human being. What a terrible impression these cruel disabilities might have made upon the young mind. But he was quite strong, sensitive and yet very resolute.³⁰

Under the circumstances of such disabilities and maltreatment, Ambedkar cultivated a spirit of patience. All such insulting refusals and ill treatments engendered in him a burning hatred for Hinduism.

²⁸ Suresh Dalal, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, (Madras: University of Madras, 1989), 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The untouchables were prohibited to learn Sanskrit. Being an untouchable, Ambedkar also was compelled to take *Persian* as the second language in the high school, though he was interested in learning Sanskrit. Sanskrit was the key to the study of the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* were neither to be heard nor to be read by the *Shudras* and the untouchables. The teacher never touched the notebooks of the untouchable students. Some of them did not even ask them to recite poems or put any question to them for fear of being polluted. But at the same time, there was a Brahmin teacher in the high school who loved this boy very much and even dropped daily a part of his meal of boiled rice, bread, and vegetables into the hands of Ambedkar.³¹ Students from the socially backward communities especially untouchables were segregated and made to sit separately from the other people in schools. They were given gunny bags as mat to sit upon, unlike the others who were provided with wooden planks. The upper caste students and teachers hardly communicated with the students coming from the depressed classes. A blind and foolish tradition made the high caste students believe that even talking to children of the depressed classes would pollute them.³²

The hardships undergone by Ambedkar in Baroda are well known. The caste Hindus tried their best to prevent him from occupying a rented house renting a house. His peons would not hand over files to him, because he would lose his caste status in the eyes of his colleagues. He would throw official papers on the table of the learned doctor from a distance. He would pour drinking water from the jug without touching him. Life became unbearable for a self-respecting, foreign educated man like Ambedkar.³³ It was divine grace, which saved Ambedkar's life, which he was to spend in the emancipation of the untouchables from the thralldom of caste tyranny. Ambedkar had come to the conclusion that the social problems of the country required a political solution. He decided to fight the evil of untouchability all alone.

2. 2 The Movements of the Untouchables

The movement of the untouchables against the injustice of the Hindu social order has a long history behind it, especially in Maharashtra. This history falls into two stages. Petitions and protests marked the first stage. The second stage is marked by open revolt in the form of direct action against the established Hindu order. The

³¹ V.Chandra Mowli, *Dr. Ambedkar: Man and his Vision* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990),12.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ Dalal, *Dr.Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 5.

government tried to dissuade them by declaring that all public utilities and public institutions are open to all citizens including the untouchables. But the untouchables were not satisfied with the policy of the government. They began their movements that included several cases of direct action aiming at the demolition of the Hindu social order by applying dynamite to its very foundation.

2.2.1 Burning of the *Manu Smriti*

The burning of the *Manu Smriti* took place at Mahad on December 20th, 1927. The function was a part of the campaign for establishing the right to take water from the Cawdar tank. The burning of the *Manu Smriti* took place publicly and openly in a conference of untouchables. It was a deed of great daring. It was an attack on the very citadel of Hinduism. The *Manu Smriti*, that contains the Hindu codes, is insulting to persons of low castes. It deprived them of the rights of human beings and crushed their personality.³⁴

The conference felt that it was apt to lay down the goals of untouchables. The conference proclaimed that the untouchables wanted a complete overhauling of the Hindu social system. It further affirmed that this reconstruction must not be based on the old foundation of *Shastras*. It maintained that whatever be the character of the new foundation, it must be consonant with justice and equality between the Hindus and the *Shudras*.³⁵

The *Manu Smriti* is the sacred scripture of the Hindus. Being scared it is infallible. Every Hindu believes in its sanctity and obeys its injunctions. *Manu* not only upholds caste and untouchability but also gives them a legal sanction. The *Manu Smriti* embodies the spirit of inequality. It keeps the untouchables outside of the Hindu fold because it did not acknowledge the fifth *Varna*. The untouchables were not at all happy with the principles of the *Manu Smriti*. Thus, they burnt it in front of the Brahmins. The burning of the *Manu Smriti* by the untouchables at Mahad in 1927 is an event, which has same significance and importance in the history of the emancipation of the untouchables.³⁶

³⁴ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 252.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

2.2.2 Refusal of Untouchables to carry dead Bodies

One of the duties of the untouchables is to remove the skin off and carry the dead animals of the Hindus in the villages. If the untouchables refuse to perform these duties to the Hindus the land on which they live is liable to be confiscated. They have to choose between doing the dirty work or facing starvation.

The important thing to note is that the conference of the untouchables, which met in Mahad, resolved that untouchables would neither remove the skin of the dead animals of the Hindus nor carry it or eat the carrion. The minor and major objectives of these resolutions were to foster among the untouchables self-respect, self-esteem and to strike a blow at the Hindu social order. It aimed at making the Hindus do their dirty jobs themselves. The history of the revolt against the established social order of Hindus originated in Bombay, but it spread to all parts India.³⁷

2.2.3 Temple Entry

Ambedkar carried out his fight on political as well as religious fronts. He wanted the untouchables to have the right to enter a Hindu temple. In 1929, the *Parvati* temple entry Satyagraha was organized at Poona wherein the unarmed untouchables and caste Hindu participants were attacked and injured. Among them were the untouchables' Chamber leaders, Pandurang Nathuji Rajbhoj and N.V. Gadgil. N.V. Gadgil was popularly known as Kakasaheb Gadgal. After this there was a famous Kalaram temple entry at Nasik. The Satyagraha was carried out from 1930 to 1935, but when obduracy of the orthodox Hindu did not relent, Ambedkar made his resolve before the public that though he was born a Hindu, he would not die as a Hindu. He fulfilled this promise by embracing Buddhism till his death. The main aim of the temple entry Satyagraha was to make the entry possible in the temple for the untouchables.³⁸

2.2.4 Choudar Tank

His agitational politics started with the Mahad march to the Choudar Tank. In 1925, the Municipality passed a resolution to keep open its tank to the depressed classes. In pursuance of the resolution, Ambedkar led a march to take water from the tank. The powerful majority of the conservative society was unwilling to part its hold

³⁷ Ibid., 258.

³⁸ Dalal, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 14.

and the power structure had to be confronted. The march was successful but after having fetched water from the tank, rumors were spread that the untouchables were also planning to enter the temple of *Vireswar* situated in Mahad. Instigated by such rumors a large crowd of high caste Hindus armed with bamboo sticks attacked the untouchables. Delegates of the untouchables went to Ambedkar's bungalow and asked for a green signal to retaliate. Ambedkar was not an extremist. He, like Gandhiji, preached and practiced peace and non-violence.³⁹ He said: "We do not want to fight a physical battle where we can hurt only few individuals; we will fight a ferocious battle where we can fight with the enemy of casteism."⁴⁰

Like a law-abiding citizen, he lodged complaint with the police and in spite of the advantages, which the caste Hindu hooligans had, five of them were sentenced for four months rigorous imprisonment because of the untiring efforts of Ambedkar. While Congress was waging the Quit India Movement, a political and socially disillusioned Ambedkar was quietly working for the betterment and upliftment of the untouchables. He was described as a traitor and as a stooge of Britishers. But he took all these accusations in its stride and continued to do his splendid work. .

2. 3. Rejection of Hinduism

Born as an untouchable, Ambedkar was not an exception to face and experience the same humiliation and tribulation, which every untouchable had to face on those days. He was humiliated in school, college, institution, or society. He struggled continuously to face poverty and untouchability. In his own words: "Owing to the poverty of my father I did not have the opportunity to enjoy any of these luxuries. Till late in life I suffered excessively and labored very hard."⁴¹

Ambedkar struggled a lot get the answer regarding the suffering of a particular section of people in a big society. He blamed Hinduism, which, he thought, was the reason for this plight. He believed that the Hinduism was based on inequality and injustice. It divided men cruelly in the name of caste. In its fold some people became untouchables and slaves. It never encouraged them to develop their minds and to advance in life. It suppressed the enthusiasm and inspiration of the students of the downtrodden class of people. He realized intensely that the Hindu religion did not

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Dalal, 13.

⁴¹ K.S. Chalam, *Relevance of Ambedkarism in India*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 1993), 46.

appeal to his conscience, and did not appeal to his self-respect. So as long as the downtrodden remain in the Hindu fold, they cannot lift their heads up and move fearlessly.⁴² To quote him: “This religion and the social order had ruined us. But this is not going to stop here. This would ruin the Hindus themselves and ultimately India.”⁴³

So he decided not to live any more in the Hindu fold. Though by chance he was a born Hindu, he did not want, at least, to die a Hindu. Since then he went on constantly thinking and searching for the most appropriate form of religion that touches the heart to the grief stricken humanity.

Ambedkar wanted that Hinduism should be reorganized and Hindu thought should be revitalized on the basis of social equality, liberty, fraternity, and democracy, both for the sake of Hinduism and the Indian nation. He said: “Caste has had a bad effect on the ethics of the Hindus. It has killed public spirit, destroyed sense of public charity and narrowed down public opinion has respected man’s loyalty to his caste, made virtue and morality caste ridden.”⁴⁴

2.4 Significance of Buddhism in Ambedkar’s life

In spite of all the atrocities that he had gone through, Ambedkar was not against religion. He considered it essential for the proper development of mankind. He did not agree with those who said that religion is parasite or is an opiate. Religion instills hope in human beings and drives them for activity. Buddha’s religion was based on proper reflection and reason. He asked his disciples not to follow him blindly, but accept him only after testing his words with reason.

Ambedkar felt that modern civilization needed such a rational religion. He wished to have the religion in the sense of morality, which remains the governing principle in every society. It must be scientific. As a social code of morality it must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. The most important aspect is that it has to enrich the lives of people mentally and materially and

⁴² Ibid., 46.

⁴³ Qtd. in Chalam, 46.

⁴⁴ Arvind P. Nirmal, *A Centenary Tribute*, (Madras: Department of Dalit Theology, 1991), 79.

protect their dignity, value and self-respect. Ambedkar found that Buddhism was the only religion that satisfied all these requirements.⁴⁵

At the age of sixteen Ambedkar was fascinated by the book called *Buddha Charita* in Marathi. He realized that Buddhism was the greatest of all the religions in the world as it was not merely a religion but a great social doctrine. His research-oriented mind was fully convinced by the logical, empirical, humanistic and pragmatic teachings of the Buddha. He observed that besides *Ahimsa*, Buddha taught many other things, such as social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. Ambedkar emphatically says that Buddhism is the most appropriate religion in which there is no place for the distinction of high or low, rich or poor, caste or color, etc. It is the religion based on equality and universal brotherhood.⁴⁶

Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on October 14, 1956 at Nagpur along with many of his followers. After his initiation into Buddhism he gave the following message to his fellow Buddhists:

Having embraced Buddhism, the responsibility of following it sincerely rests on you. Try to elevate the nobility of this religion by your own behavior. Try to spread the message of Buddha and liberate the people not only of your own country but also of the world. Keep up the dignity of the religion you have embraced.⁴⁷

Ambedkar says that the struggle of the downtrodden is not simply for economic progress, but for honor and self-respect. He said:

For a man it is his birthright to lead an honorable life. To achieve this aim, we must do our utmost. We are prepared to make the greatest sacrifice for achieving this. We are struggling for human dignity. We want to make our life as full and whole some as possible. We have started this movement to develop and educate our mind.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Dalal, 27.

⁴⁸ Qtd. in Chalam, 50.

One needs confidence, courage and will to rise. Ambedkar believed that Buddhism as humanistic religion provides all these things. The essence of Buddhism lies in working practically for one's freedom-economic, social and political freedom. Buddha was the torchbearer of democracy and an ardent exponent of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is only in Buddhism, he insisted, that human persons can have freedom.

Another interesting observation made by Ambedkar in Buddhism was the equal treatment of women. It is true that the Buddha did advise his disciples not to make it a habit to visit families of lay disciples for fear of human weakness yielding to frequent contact with women. But he did not forbid such visits nor did he express any regard about women as inferior to men. He wanted to treat them and regard them as mothers, sisters and daughters depending on their age. He knew that women were fully capable of realizing his doctrine and discipline. That is why he maintained *Bhikkuni Sangha* along with *Bhikku Sangha*. *Bhikkuni Sangha* has been opened for all classes of women, married, unmarried, widowed and even for prostitutes. All could acquire merit, freedom, dignity, and equality along with men.⁴⁹

Ambedkar says that it is the duty of every Buddhist to visit *Buddha Vihara* on every Sunday and listen to the discourses. Unless this is done, the neo—Buddhists will not be able to understand Buddha properly. He also suggested his men not to encourage violence work hard and educate themselves and face any problem with calm and peaceful way, without fear in mind.

The untouchables have been trying to break up the Hindu social structure. Though the leading member of the untouchables, Ambedkar is not here, but his movements are very much active. As a result, people have become aware of their rights and they fight for their rights. In the next chapter, I shall deal with the origin and analysis of the untouchability according to Ambedkar.

⁴⁹ Chalam, *Relevance of Ambedkarism in India*, 50.

CHAPTER 3

AMBEDKAR'S ANALYSIS OF UNTOUCHABILITY

3.1 The Origin of Untouchability

Ambedkar refer to the following features in order to deal with the origin of the untouchables among primitive and modern societies.

- (1) Primitive society consisted of nomadic communities whereas modern society consists of settled communities.
- (2) Primitive society consisted of tribal communities based on blood relationship whereas modern society consists of local communities based on territorial affiliation. Thus we can say that primitive society developed in two ways namely from a tribal to a territorial community and from a nomadic to a settled community.⁵⁰

According to Ambedkar, primitive society was nomadic. These tribes went from one place to another with their cattle. But as time went on, they discovered new wealth namely land. And they started to live in one community, which was called settled community. They learned the art of framing and of cultivating land. Thus there was change in their occupation from cattle to land.⁵¹

According to Ambedkar, two important features marked primitive society, in its transition from nomadic life to the life of a settled community.

All tribes in primitive society could not settle at one place at the same time. Some of them settled and some remained nomadic. The settled tribes were always in danger because the nomadic tribes felt envious of them. They systematically organized raids on the settled tribes with the motive of stealing wealth like cattle, corn, and women of the settled communities. The hostility between the settled and the nomadic tribes perpetually existed. This hostility found its expression in chronic war. The settled tribes of primitive society faced the problems of their defence.⁵²

⁵⁰ D.R. Jativa, *Dr. Ambedkar: Social Philosophy* (Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 1997), 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

In such situation, the organized raids always disturbed normal life. In a tribal war it often happened that a tribe instead of being completely annihilated was defeated and routed. In many cases a defeated tribes became broken people. As a consequence of this, floating groups consisting of broken tribes were always roaming in all direction.

The primitive society was fundamentally tribal in its organization. Every individual in primitive society belonged to a tribe. Outside the tribe no individual had any existence. Another important aspect is that tribal organization was based on common blood and common kinship. Therefore, an individual born in one tribe could not join another tribe and become a member of it. The broken people had, therefore, to live as stray individuals. In the primitive society where one tribe was fighting against the other tribes, a stray collection of broken people was always in danger of being attacked. They did not know where to go for their shelter and protection.⁵³

There was a time in the primitive society when the settled tribes were in search of men who would do the work of watch and ward against the raiders belonging to *Nomadic* tribes. On the other hand, the broken people from defeated tribes were facing the problems of finding patrons who would give them food and shelter. It is interesting to know how these heterogeneous people solved their problems. According to Ambedkar they struck a bargain where the broken people agreed to do the work of watch and ward for the settled tribes and the settled tribes agreed to give them food and shelter.⁵⁴

Agreeing with the views of Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Stephen Fuchs says:

It is well-known fact that the nomadic animals' breeders of Inner Asia, for example, enjoy nothing more than raiding and fighting. When a tribe was defeated and routed, the survivors often used to be sold into slavery by their conquerors. Those who managed to escape had to seek the protection of another tribe. Being powerless they had often to content themselves with menial jobs, tending horses and cattle, making and repairing saddles and other leather work, such as tongs and bridles, making and cleaning weapons, etc. As these animals-breeding nomads generally despised menial and manual work; this contempt was also extended to those who had to perform it.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Qtd. in Jatava, 40.

Since in primitive society only persons of the same tribe and of the same blood, could live together, an alien could not be permitted to live in the midst of the settled tribe. From the strategic point of view also, it was desirable that those broken people had to live on the boarder of the village to meet the raids of the hostile tribes. The above both these considerations point that the broken people lived outside the village.

Ambedkar says that same process must have taken place in India where the Hindu society was passing from nomadic life to the life of a settled village community. There must have been in primitive Hindu society settled tribes, and broken people.⁵⁶

The settled tribes found the village and formed the village community whereas the broken people lived in separate quarters outside the village for the reason that they belonged to a different tribes and different blood. But the critics do not agree with this view. They search for the factual evidence that can suggest that the untouchables are broken people. Ambedkar says that the untouchables of India were originally broken people and the fact is that they lived outside the village community.⁵⁷

Ambedkar adduces two kinds of evidences to show that the untouchables were really the broken people.

The first set of the facts consists in the names *Antya*, *Antyaja* and *Antyavasin*, given to certain communities in the Hindu Scriptures. They have been derived from the root *Anta*. According to the Hindu order of Divine creation the word *Anta* signifies the end of creation and the word *Antya* means one who is born last namely, the untouchables in the order of Divine creation. But Ambedkar does not agree with this view. According to the Hindu theory of Divine creation, the *Shudra* is born last. The untouchable is outside the scope of this theory. Therefore, he is called *Avarna* i.e, out of *Varna*. Therefore, the Hindu theory of Divine creation cannot be applied to the untouchables. According to Ambedkar, the word *Antya* means not the end of the Divine creation but the end of the Hindu village. It was a name given to those people who lived on the outskirts of the village in the Hindu society.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Jatava, 41.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The second set of facts support that the untouchables were broken people. They belonged to Mahars of Maharashtra, the single largest community of the untouchables. The relations between the untouchable Hindus and the touchable Hindus are worthy to be noted.

- (1) Mahars are to be found in every village.
- (2) Every village in Maharashtra has a wall, and the Mahars have their quarters outside the wall.
- (3) The Mahars do not do the duty of watch and ward on behalf of the village.
- (4) The Mahars claim fifty-two rights against the Hindu villages.⁵⁹

Ambedkar argues that if such evidences are available, it should be accepted that there was a time in primitive society when the broken people lived. The broken people belonging to other tribes came to settled tribes and struck a bargain. The untouchables were allowed to settle on the outskirts of the Hindu village. These two theories offer us enough support to say that the untouchables lived outside the Hindu village from the beginning because they were broken people and belonged to a different tribe and different blood.⁶⁰ Thus, it is clear that the untouchables were the broken people and they do not belong to the four *Vernas*.

3.2 Untouchability among the Hindus

In the matter of pollution there is nothing to distinguish the Hindus from the primitive or ancient people. The pollution recognized by the Hindus is abundantly clear from the *Manu Smriti*. *Manu* recognizes physical defilement and also notional defilement. *Manu* treated birth, death and menstruation as sources of defilement. Death caused defilement to members of the family of the dead persons technically called *Sapindas* and *Samanodokas*.⁶¹ The idea of defilement in *Manu Smriti* is real and not merely notional. For he makes the food offered by the polluted persons unacceptable. *Manu* also prescribed the period of defilement. For the death of a *Sapinda* it is ten days and for children it is for three days. The period of defilement for fellow students is one day. Defilement does not vanish by the mere lapse of the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42

⁶¹ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol.7, 256.

prescribed period. At the end of the period there must be performed a purificatory ceremony appropriate to the occasion.⁶²

For the purpose of purification *Manu* treats the subject of defilement from three aspects:

(1) physical defilement (2) notional defilement or psychological defilement, and (3) ethical defilement. The rule for the purification of ethical defilement, which occurs when a person entertains evil thought, is more admonitions and exhortations. But the rites for the removal of notional and physical defilement are the same. The use of *Kusa* grass and ashes are prescribed as purification agents for removing physical impurity caused by the touch of inanimate objects. Water is the chief agent for the removal of notional defilement. It is used in three ways. (1) sipping (2) bath (3) ablution. Later on *Panchagavya* became the most important agency for removing notional defilement. It consisted of a mixture of the five products of the cow, namely milk urine dung, curds and butter.⁶³

Manu's statement that the Brahmin was ever pure does not mean that the Brahmin was free from defilement. Indeed, besides being defiled by births the Brahmins also suffered defilement on the ground which did not affect the Non-Brahmins. The *Manu Smriti* is full of taboos and don'ts that affect only the Brahmins. The Brahmins must observe those taboos. Their failure to observe them make them impure. In the *Manus Smriti* there is a provision for getting rid of defilement by transmission through a scapegoat, namely by touching the cow or looking at the sun after sipping water.⁶⁴

The Hindus also believed that territorial and communal pollution and purifications were very much like the system that prevailed among the early Romans. Every village had an annual *Jatra*. Those days there was the rule that the animal, mainly he buffalo was purchased on behalf of the village. And this animal was taken around the village and after that it was killed. After killing, the blood of the animal was sprinkled all around the village and then meat was distributed among the villagers. Every Hindu and Brahmin had to accept his share of the meat, though he

⁶² Ibid., 257.

⁶³ Ambedkar, *Writing and Speeches*, vol. 7, 258

⁶⁴ Ibid., 257

may not be a meat eater. It is not mentioned in any of the *Smritis* but it is the sanction of custom that among the Hindus it is so strong that it always overrides the law.⁶⁵

There is another form of untouchability, which is observed by the Hindus. It goes on from generation to generation-in communities. According to Ambedkar's analysis there are 50-60 millions of people in India whose mere touch causes pollution to the Hindus. The Hindus who touch untouchables and become polluted can become pure by undergoing purificatory ceremonies. The Brahmins think that there is nothing that can make the untouchables pure. They are born impure. They live and die in impurity. The untouchability among the Hindus involves the isolation of a class. The Hindus do not live inside the quarters of untouchables. It has no parallel in the history of the world.⁶⁶

3. 3 Untouchability Among the Non-Hindus

Many people are aware of the existence of untouchability among the Hindus and non-Hindus. It is worthwhile to know about the primitive society whether they recognized untouchability or not. According to Ambedkar, the primitive people believed it and that defilement was caused by

1. The occurrence of certain event
2. Contact with certain persons; and
3. Contact with certain things

Primitive people also believed in the transmission of evil from one person to another. For them the danger of such transmission was peculiarly acute at particular times such as the performance of natural functions, eating, drinking etc. The primitive people observed certain defilements which include the following; (1) Birth (2) Initiation (3) Puberty (4) Marriage (5) Cohabitation (6) Death. Expectant mothers were regarded impure and a source of defilement to others. The impurity of the mother extended to the child also.⁶⁷

The stages of initiation and puberty signify the maturity of the male and the female to full sexual and social life. The ceremonies regarding marriage show that marriage was regarded by the primitive man as impure. In some cases, as among the

⁶⁵ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, 258.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

Mundas, marriage takes place to a tree before marriage with the bridegroom. All these marriage observances are intended to neutralize the individual against the impurity of marriage. Death was the worst pollution in primitive people. This is not only regarding the corpse, but also the belongings of the deceased were regarded as infected with the pollution. All the rights and ceremonies connected with birth death marriage etc. do not unequivocally suggest that they were regarded as sources of pollution. All these practices indicate that in every case there is segregation. There is segregation and isolation in birth, initiation, marriage, and death and in dealing with the sacred and the strange.⁶⁸

The mother is segregated at birth. At puberty and initiation there is segregation and seclusion for a period. In marriage, from the time of betrothal until the actual ceremony bride and bridegroom do not meet. A woman is subjected to segregation during menstruation. Segregation is most noticeable in the case of death. There is not only isolation of the dead body but there is isolation of all the relatives of the dead from the rest of the community. This segregation is evidenced by the growth of hair and nail and wearing of old clothes by the relatives of the dead that show that they are not, served by the rest of the society such as the barber, washer man etc. The period of segregation and the range of segregation differ in the case of death but the fact of segregation is beyond dispute. In the case of defilement of the sacred by the profane or of the kindred or by intercourse with the non-kindred there is also the element of segregation. Thus, it is clear that in primitive society pollution involved segregation of the polluting agent.⁶⁹

There is not much difference between the Egyptian system of pollution and that of the primitive system. Among the Greeks the causes of impurity were bloodshed, the presence of ghost and contact with death, sexual intercourse, childbirth, the evacuation of the body, the eating of certain food such as pea- soup, cheese and garlic, the intrusion of unauthorized persons into holy places, and, in certain circumstances, foul speech and quarrel. The purificatory means, usually called *Kaopoia* by Greeks, were lustral water, onions, fumigation and fire, incense, etc.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 252.

Through the above description, it is clear that people of primitive or ancient age practiced pollution in different forms.⁷⁰

3.4 The Broken People Became the Untouchables

Eating of beef created a big gap between the settled community and the broken people. According to Ambedkar there was a time when the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins ate beef. In ancient times, animal sacrifice was a religious rite, according to which, the slaughter of cows and that of other animals was colossal and was frequently eaten by the Brahmin priests. The non-Brahmins could not eat beef everyday because cow was a costly animal.⁷¹

It is Buddhism that repudiated the sacrifices of cows and other animals. It created a strong feeling of reverence towards all sentient beings in the minds of the people. The prohibition attracted the people and they appreciated it. According to Ambedkar, it made a deep impression that even the broken people embraced Buddhism. They began to criticize the Brahmins for its colossal sacrifice. This is the reason why the Brahmins suffered at the hands of Buddhism, the religion of compassion, love and friendship.⁷²

All the *Bikkhus* gave up eating of beef. They attracted many people, especially the agricultural sections, to which the cow was a very useful animal. There was no other way for the Brahmins to improve their social position against the rising influence of the Buddhists except by giving up the *Yanjna* as a form of worship and also the sacrifice of the cow.⁷³ Unfortunately, eating of beef, instead of being treated as a purely secular matter, was made a religious matter. This happened because the Brahmins made the cows sacred animals. This made eating of beef a sacrilege. The broken people who continued to eat beef even after cows were considered sacred were treated as untouchables and they were considered beyond the pole of the Hindu society.⁷⁴ The broken people were a community of paupers with no means of livelihood and entirely dependent upon the settled community. The principle item of food was beef for them. On the other hand, the Brahmins left eating beef in order to snatch away from the *Buddhist Bhikhus* the supremacy they had acquired. Without

⁷⁰ Ibid., 254.

⁷¹ Jatava, *Dr. Ambedkar: Social Philosophy*, 46.

⁷² Ibid., 46.

⁷³ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁴ Dr. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, 350.

becoming vegetarians the Brahmins could not have recovered the ground they had lost to their rival namely Buddhism.⁷⁵

We have no positive evidence to show that members of the settled community never ate the flesh of the dead cow. But we have negative evidence that shows that the dead cow had become an exclusive possession and perquisite of the broken people. The evidence consists of facts that relate to the Mahars of the Maharashtra. The Mahars of the Maharashtra claimed the rights to take the dead animals. They claimed this right against every Hindu in the village. This means that no Hindu can eat the flesh of his own animal when it dies. He has to surrender it to the Mahar.⁷⁶

Thus, it can be said that both the Hindus and the broken people used to eat beef. But the Hindus, in order to have supremacy over Buddhism, left eating beef. The broken people continued eating beef and so they are called untouchables. Ambedkar's analysis of the origin of untouchability gives us the picture of how untouchability developed and how it is practiced among different sect of people. In the next chapter I have mentioned some of the problems of the untouchables. The next chapter deals with some of the problems that the untouchables face in their life.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 350.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 354.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROBLEMS OF UNTOUCHABLES

The untouchables are the most unfortunate people of the Indian society. They are subjected to various forms of sufferings and humiliations in their daily life. Some of problems are given below.

4.1 Antagonism of the Administration

The established Hindu social order has continued to exist because of the unflinching support it received from the Hindu officials of the states. Their motto is that justice consists with the established order. By all means the Hindus try to maintain their cultural and political hegemony in society. As a result of this the untouchables are often denied their justice.

For an instance, if an untouchable goes to a police officer with a complaint against the caste Hindu, instead of receiving any protection, he will receive plenty of abuses. He will either be driven away without his complaint being recorded or if it is recorded, it would be recorded quite falsely to provide a way of escape to the aggressor. If he prosecutes his offenders before a magistrate the fate of his proceeding could be foretold. The untouchables will never be able to get Hindus as witnesses because the Hindus do not support the case of the untouchables, however it may be. If he brings witnesses from the untouchables, the magistrate will not accept their testimony because he can easily say that they are not independent witnesses. If they are independent witnesses the magistrate has an easy way of acquitting the accused by saying that the untouchables' evidence did not strike him as a truthful witness.⁷⁷ Thus, the lowest classes of people are often denied of justice in several instances. V.B. Rawat says "Thirteen years after the brutal massacre of the *Dalits* at Tsunder in Andhra Pradesh, the trial began at a special court in December 2004, only to be interrupted once again and rescheduled for February 2005. The families of the victims of Tsundur still await justice for those who died. They say that they will not find

⁷⁷ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 104.

peace until the guilty are punished for their crime.”⁷⁸ While fighting for their justice the lower class of people suffer a lot.

The annual Report of the *Tamil Nad Harijan Sevak Sangh* for the year ending September 30, 1937 says:

The political consciousness of the *Harijans* having been roused by the rights in the remotest villages where it is only the policeman that reign, it is not always possible for the *Harijan* to do this, for the assertion of his rights mean a clash between him and the caste men, in which it is always the latter that have the upper hand. The natural consequences of this scuffle are a complaint either to the police or the magistrate. The latter course is beyond the means of a *Harijan* while the former resort is worse than useless. The complaints are in many cases not enquired into at all, while in others a verdict favorable to the caste men is entered. Our complaints to the police also meet with similar fate. The trouble seems to us to be that there is no change in the mentality of the lower policemen. Either he is unaware of the rights of the *Harijans* of which he is supposed to be the guardian or the caste men influence him. Or it may also be that he is absolutely indifferent. In other cases, corruption is responsible for his taking side of the richer caste men. This shows how the Hindu officials are anti-untouchables and pro-Hindus.⁷⁹

This kind of partiality is inherited in every caste Hindu and it has been systematically cultivated by the teaching and philosophical outlook of the ancient Hindu philosopher such as Manu. Consequently, the caste Hindus are openly hostile and inimical to the aspiration of the untouchables. The civil servants, being higher caste Hindus maintain the unjust order that in turn secures their authority and prestige.

4.2 The Problems of Discrimination

The discrimination practiced by the Hindus against the untouchables is impossible to imagine. In the past, the untouchables could not cover their heads, chests, or legs below the knees. Gold and silvers were also prohibited to them as well as shoes and parasols. They had to speak to a superior with eyes covered and holding their hands to the month. They had to cross their arms over their chest as a sign of humility. In their language, they used terms which were specified to them; a *Malayali* untouchable, when speaking of his children had to call them his *Calves* and the untouchable had to refer to a high caste-man and even his children by the name *Lord*.

⁷⁸ V. B. Rawat “Justice Delayed Justice Denied” *Communalism Combat*, January, 2005, 27.

⁷⁹ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 105.

On the contrary, even the children of the high caste called the untouchables with humiliating names.⁸⁰

An untouchable could not sit down in the presence of a member of a high caste, or could sit only in an inferior position. When an untouchable encountered a high caste man in the streets, he had to go down into the ditch, in order to leave the street clear. He had to carry out all the tasks that he was ordered to do so and allow him to be beaten by a high-caste man.⁸¹

In Tamil Nadu, the ancestors of the Paraiyars of Valgghira Manckam witnessed most of these discriminations only some decades ago. In the region, the dominant caste is that of the kallars. This caste has a warlike demeanour and it's member-stopped at nothing when it came to getting respect out of people. Until recently, Paraiyars could not go to school. Neither could they bathe in the municipal *Oorani*, pond. Everything they wished to undertake had to be sanctioned by the higher caste on whom they depended. They were not paid for the various tasks that they carried out, but simply received a few measures of grain at the harvest. Paraiyars were not used to allow into the tea shops. They had to remain outside and drink their tea in coconut shells and, later on in glasses different from those used by the high caste. They had to maintain an attitude of humility in a kallar's presence. The Kallars used the *Harijans* as they sent a message to the *Ceri* and the Harijans had to come immediately, on pain of being beaten.⁸²

In every field of life there is discrimination against the untouchables. In the matter of social relationship, it takes the form of barriers against dancing, bathing, eating, drinking, wrestling and worshiping. It puts a ban on all common cycles of participation:

It has affected law Court, Government departments, co-operative banks, particularly the police. Discrimination against untouchables in the matter of securing land credit, jobs exist in the most rampant form. It is in service that discrimination shows itself most strongly. Though there are no regulations, there are well-recognized rules, which govern the entry and promotion of the untouchables in the matter of service. Most often untouchables do not get any entry. All the departments are closed to them. The principle in general is

⁸⁰ Robert Deliege, *The World of the Untouchables* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

maintained that the untouchables shall not be placed in administrative authority over the higher caste.⁸³

The only field of service in which there is no discrimination against the untouchables is scavenging. All unclean works are done by the untouchables. But all supervisory posts which carry higher salary and which do not involve contact with filth are all filled by the higher caste. In this situation rights of the people and for the people cannot mean Government for the untouchables. Equal opportunity for all cannot mean equal rights for the untouchables. It is true that only the untouchables labor under tremendous disadvantage. This discrimination is the strongest barrier against the untouchables.⁸⁴ All these have resulted in the unemployment and social insecurity of the untouchables. Life has become very insecure due to economic backwardness. The discrimination against the untouchables is merely the reflection of that deep and strong Hindu sentiment which is carried over in law and administration. The caste Hindus are afraid that if the untouchables arise above the prescribed station of life the Hindu social structure will collapse. The cardinal principle is the maintenance of Hindu superiority and Hindu domination over the untouchables. As long as the Hindu social order lasts, discriminations against the untouchables will continue to exist.⁸⁵

4.3 The Low Dignity and Status of the Untouchables

The other form of discrimination is the low level of dignity and the status of the untouchables. If a Hindu leader becomes a leader, then he prefers to be called a great Indian leader. No one describes him as the leader of Kashmir Brahmin even though he is one. If a leader who happens to be an untouchable is to be referred to as the leader of the untouchables. If a Hindu becomes a doctor, he is regarded as a great Indian doctor. If a doctor happens to be untouchables he is regarded as the untouchable doctor. A Hindu singer is considered as a great Indian singer. If a singer person happens to be an untouchable, he would be regarded as an untouchable singer.⁸⁶ Since the untouchables are the lowest of the low in Indian caste system, they are forced to do dirty jobs. Ashok Bharati writes: "The high castes want untouchables to clear their dead bodies but when it comes to accepting relief, they want to ensure

⁸³ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, 108.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

that we are nowhere around because they cannot stomach the idea of sharing anything with the untouchables.”⁸⁷ Mohan, a *Dalit* municipal cleaner says: “I am only doing what I would do for my own wife and children It is our duty. If a dog is dead, or a person, we have to clean it up.”⁸⁸

This type of discrimination has its origin in the Hindu view that the untouchables are inferior people and not qualified; their great men are only great among the untouchables. They can never be greater or even equal to the great men among the Hindus. This type of discrimination, though social in character, is no less than economic discrimination.⁸⁹

4. 4 Absence of Freedom

Discrimination is another name for absence of Freedom. Mr.Tawney says:

There is no such thing as freedom in the market, divorced from the realities of a specific time and place. Whatever else it may or may not imply, it involves the power of choice between alternatives—a choice which is real, not merely nominal, between alternatives which exist in fact, not only paper. It means, in short, the ability to do- or refrains from doing definite things at a definite moment, in definite circumstances, or it means nothing at all. Because a man is most a man when he thinks, wills and acts, freedom deserves the outline things, which poets have said about it; but as a part of the prose of every day life, it is quite practical and realistic. Every individual possesses certain requirements—ranging from the material necessities of existence to the need to express himself in speech and writing, to share in the conduct of affairs of common interest, and to worship God in his own way or to refrain from worshipping him- the satisfaction of which it is necessary to his welfare. Reduced to its barest essential, his freedom consist in the opportunity secured by him, within the limits set by nature and the enjoyment of similar opportunities by his fellows, to take the action needed to order, to ensure that these requirement are satisfied.⁹⁰

There are two aspects that apply to all of them. In the first place, if the rights to vote, live, and to express oneself are to be effective guarantee of freedom, they must not be merely formed, but whenever the occasion arises to exercise them, they can in fact be exercised. In the second place, the rights that are essential to freedom must be such as to secure the liberties of all, not merely of a minority. A society in

⁸⁷ Ashok Bharati, “Tsunami and Shame,” *Communalism Combat*, January,2005, 20.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁹ Ambedkar. *Writings and Speeces*.vol. 5, 109.

⁹⁰ Qtd. in Ambedkar, 110.

which some groups can do what they please, while others can do little of what they ought, may have virtues of its own; but freedom is not one of them.⁹¹ Absence of freedom means affirm others by denying oneself. It is a state in which the untouchables are compelled to fulfill the will of others by negating one's will. It will be clear from an example. I have seen personally in some parts of Bihar, the Mushahars are forced by the landlord to work in their fields with very low wages. The landlords have no dignity and respect for the Mushahars.

4.5 Problem of Isolation

The Hindu social structure is divided into two classes namely, caste-Hindus *Savarna* and Non-caste Hindus *Avarna*. Then again caste and non-caste Hindus are divided into many sub-divisions. They create the Hindu social order because they want to limit the benefit to themselves and not to share with the untouchables. They want to preserve superior self-image. They want to become rich.⁹²

It is obvious that these classes *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudras* are natural allies. If they come together, they can overthrow the established Hindu social order. But they have not done it. It is not that no attempt has been made to unite them. Non-Brahmin party, which ruled between 1919-1935, was an attempt to unite them into one political organization to destroy the dominance of the Brahmins who are the architects of the Hindu social order.⁹³ The labor leader made another attempt particularly the communists. They preached that there is an identity of interest of the working class, no matter to what community they belonged. But they developed in them class consciousness and class unity. The labor leaders were of the opinion that the working could use their terrifying power to break down the economic order. Once the economic order falls to the ground the social order of the Hindu is bound to go to pieces. The result is that the solidarity has failed to come. The *Shudras* and the Primitive Tribes are more hostile to the untouchables than they are to the Brahmins. Indeed it is the *Shudras* who act as the police force of the Brahmins for repelling of the untouchables on the Hindu social order. The atrocities that are committed upon the untouchables are all the doings of the *Shudras*. The reason for this want of solidarity is not far to seek. It is found in the system of graded inequality where the Brahmin is

⁹¹ Ibid., 110.

⁹² Ibid., 112.

⁹³ Ibid., 115.

above everybody; the *Shudras* is below the Brahmin and above the untouchables.⁹⁴ If the Hindu social order were based on inequality, it would have been overthrown long ago. But it is based on graded inequality so that the *Shudras* while he is anxious to pull down the Brahmin, he is not prepared to see the untouchables rise to his level. He prefers to suffer the indignities heaped upon him by the Brahmins. The reason is that, there are very few people to join the untouchables in their struggle. The untouchables are not only isolated by the Brahmins but also by the very classes who ought to be their natural allies oppose them. This isolation is more obstacles in the removal of untochability.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 116.

CHAPTER 5

MEANS FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF UNTOUCHABLES

The emancipation of the untouchables began by establishing an association called the *Bahishkrut Hitkarni Sabha* (Depressed Classes' Welfare Association) on 20th, July 1924 at Parel in Bombay. The aim of this association was to make the untouchables aware of their miserable plight, their legitimate rights and to arouse among them consciousness of their rights. In pursuance of this aim, Ambedkar gave them a three-pronged: "Educate, Organize and Agitate".⁹⁶ His direct participation and commitment to the movement for the upliftment of the untouchability is remarkable. He took different means for their emancipation.

5.1 Education: A Means for the Emanicipation

Ambedkar was convinced that education alone could emancipate the untouchables. The establishment of the Siddharth college in Bombay in 1945 and the Millind college at Aurangabad in 1951 stand witness to his endeavor to make higher education not only available to the depressed classes but also to put the rails of the administration of such educational institutions in their hands. Ambedkar realized that the significance of organized activity to carry forward his movement. He considered education to be essential for all men and women irrespective of their social and economic status. All men and women must get at least the minimum education so that they may know how to read and write. The primary education caters to the minimum essential need of educating the masses.⁹⁷

Education provides strength and opportunity for them to fight against poverty, disease, and backwardness. According to him the purpose of education was to help the students to study the situation critically. Therefore, education should be scientific, detached, and impartial in character.

In the realm of higher education, Ambedkar was in favour of giving teachers necessary freedom to frame their own syllabus and assess the performance of their students. He was opposed to prescribing and following a rigidly structured syllabus.

⁹⁶ Dalal, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

He gave emphasis on promoting education and research in universities rather than converting them into conducting examination and degree distributing bodies.⁹⁸

He founded people's Education Society on 8th, July 1945 with a view to advancing the educational interest of the downtrodden sections of the Indian society in general and the Scheduled Castes in particular. He considered education the most powerful agent for bringing about desired changes in society. For him education was as instrument to liberate the *Dalits* from illiteracy, ignorance and superstition and thus enable them to fight against all forms of injustice, exploitation and oppression.⁹⁹

He believed that untouchables had to attain political power. They had to have training in political participation and the electoral politics. With this objective, he established the Independent Labor Party in 1936 and the scheduled caste federation in 1942. He contested elections on the plank of these political parties .He gave the call "be a ruling class".¹⁰⁰

5.2 Social Emancipation

It was Ambedkar who ultimately succeeded to give legal rights of equality and social justice to millions of suffering masses of the untouchables and the exploited. This unique achievement was largely due to Ambedkar's efforts, and he, therefore, rightly can be called the liberator of the helpless untouchables and the tribals of India, who were treated for centuries no better than so many sects of condemned sub-humans.

Ambedkar was, on occasions, found to be too aggressive, arrogant, and extremely uncompromising in his attitude. He deliberately preferred to keep himself away from the mainstream of the freedom movement, as its leadership appeared to him to be exclusively in the hands of the people who predominantly belonged to the upper castes.

He also published a paper as the mouthpiece of his organization on 21st, January 1920. It was first named *Mook Nayak* (Dumb-Leader) and then *Bahiskrit Bharat* (Outcaste India). He, in his weekly paper, *Mook Nayak* (the leader of the Dumb or the voice of the Dumb) wrote:

⁹⁸ Sudarshan Agarwal, *Dr. Ambedkar: The Man and His Message* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall, 1991), 184.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Dalal, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 13.

It is imperative to suggest ways and means to redress the wrongs done to the depressed classes, and to discuss the measures for their upliftment. A journal reaching the mass is the best means to achieve this end". In this manner Dr. Ambedkar took upon himself the responsibility of rousing the conscious of the people.¹⁰¹

He was not unaware of the social movements organized by Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda, and Vivekananda for reforming the caste-character of the Hindu society. But it appeared to Ambedkar that the approach for religious reformation of the Hindu society for elimination of caste-events and giving the status of social equality to the untouchables or the depressed classes would not be more effective than the political approach to deal with this deeply entrenched caste-conservatism among the Hindus. He, therefore, decided to organize his movement primarily along political lines.¹⁰²

Through the medium of his journals like *Janata* renamed as *Prabuddha Bharat* Ambedkar endeavored to educate the people on social, political, historical, religious, educational, economic, and other problems of the downtrodden people of India. His writing's breathed rationalism and humanism, and they revolutionized the outlook of the untouchables, completely as never before.¹⁰³

Ambedkar adopted a two-fold programme for his movement. The first programme was meant to propagate the cause of the untouchables and unite them under the banner of an organization' and question the very religious concept and justification of the caste system. Though as an untouchable, he was not allowed to study Sanskrit in his school days; nevertheless, in later days, he himself defiantly mastered the Sanskrit language to study the Hindu-religious books, particularly those *Sastras* that justified the system of caste stratification of the Hindu society. He wrote a number of books like *Annihilation of Caste*, *Who Were the Sudras* and *How They came to be the Fourth Varna in Indo-Aryan Society? The Untouchables, Who Are They And Why They Became Untouchables?* etc. He, thus, daringly challenged the religious validity and the precepts behind the caste system at its very *Sastric* root. This created immense self-confidence among untouchables, who were made to suffer from a crippling inferiority complex.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ K. N. Kandam, *Ambedkar and the Significance of His Movement* (London: Sangam Limited, 1991), 22.

¹⁰² Agarwal, *Dr. Ambedkar: The Man and His Message*, 184.

¹⁰³ Kandam, *Ambedkar and The Significance of His Movement*, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Agarwal, *Ambedkar: The Man and His Message*, 185.

He asked the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes to forget all about the sins of their ancestors and strongly pleaded with them not to wait for their fictitious rebirth for the alleviation of their sufferings. He urged them that their social liberation must be ensured in this very life and that too as their legitimate right as free citizen.¹⁰⁵

5.3 Political Movement

Ambedkar believed that by getting the recognition of the Depressed Class as a separate minority community like the Muslims from the British Raj, it would be easier to gain political power and consequent legal rights of equality and social justice for the untouchables and the outcaste. He, therefore, decided not only to ask for legally recognized status of minority community for the Depressed Class but also for introducing the system of separate electorate for choosing their representations to legislature. For this purpose he submitted a memorandum to the Indian statutory Commission, which was set up by the British government in 1928. In 1930 the Round Table Conference was convened by the British rule for Indian Administrative reform. Ambedkar was nominated by the British Government to this conference for representing the interests of the Depressed Class before it. In the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar claimed a separate minority state with right for separate electorate for the Depressed Class.¹⁰⁶

Ambedkar gave the evidence in a written statement to the Franchise committee, on 27th January. He pleaded for communal representation, saying:

Communal representation is a device to word off the “evil effect of the division.” By the words, “evil effect of the division” he clearly meant the evil effect of caste and untouchability. He further stated that the interests of the untouchables’ can be represented by the untouchables alone. There is distinctly their own interest and none else can truly voice them.¹⁰⁷

The British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald readily accepted the demand of Ambedkar and announced it in the communal Award of 1932.

He was of the opinion that the untouchables should be regarded citizens. According to him, citizenship means a bundle of rights such as personal liberty,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁶ Agarwal, *Ambedkar: The Man and His Message*, 185.

¹⁰⁷ Qtd. in Kadam, 21.

personal security; right to hold private property, equality before law, liberty of conscience, freedom of opinion, speech, right of assembly, right of representation in a country's government and right to hold office under the state.¹⁰⁸

Urging the Depressed Class to participate in the politics and legislatures of the country, Ambedkar said: "I am in a situation in which Tilak was once placed .As long as the opponents curse me; it is taken for granted that my work for you is on the right lines and is justified. During the last two thousand years never was such an attempt made to annihilate untouchability."¹⁰⁹

The untouchables are now convinced that the demand for *Swaraj* and the cause of the Hindus will suffer for want of support from the depressed Classes. Ambedkar said that whatever the Hindus do for you is not out of charity or mercy. They do it for their own welfare as well. The mission of our movement is to fight out tyranny, injustice and false traditions, and to undo all privileges and release the harassed people from bondage. Our cause has gained recognitions because of our ceaseless struggle.¹¹⁰

Addressing the women he said:

Never regard yourselves as untouchables. Live a clean life. Dress yourselves like the touchable ladies. Never mind if your dresses is full of patches, but see that it is clean. None can restrict your freedom in the choice of your garments and in the use of the mental for your ornaments. Attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help.¹¹¹

Ambedkar recommended to the Minority Committee of the Round Table Conference that the Depressed Classes couldn't consent subjecting themselves to majority rule in their present state of hereditary bondsmen. Before majority rule is established their emancipation from the system of untouchability must be an accomplished fact. It must not be left to the will of the majority .The Depressed Classes must be made free citizens entitled to all the rights of citizenship in common with other citizens of the state.¹¹² Ambedkar writes: "In slavery the master at any rate

¹⁰⁸ V.Chandra Mowli, *Dr. Ambedkar: Man and Vision* (Sterling Publication, 1990), 67.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Qtd. in Mowli, 66.

¹¹² Mowli, 67.

had the responsibility to feed cloths, and house the slave and keep him in good conditions lest the market value of the slave should decrease, But in the system of untouchability, the Hindus takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchables.”¹¹³

Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation. That is because there is no independent public opinion to condemn it and there is no impartial machinery of administration to retain it. There is no appeal to public opinion, for whatever public there is, it is the opinion of the Hindus who belong to the exploiting class and as such favor exploitation.

The Communal Award was a great triumph for Ambedkar. However, for Gandhiji it was a threat to divide the Hindu community with a sinister imperialist design to weaken the main base of the freedom movement. The Mahatma, who was then imprisoned, started fast unto death to save the unity of the Hindu society by preserving the system of joint electorate for all Hindus. The whole country was anxiously waiting for a positive response from Ambedkar, who was in a dilemma either to yield to the moral appeal of the Mahatma or stick to the political gains that he thought he had achieved for the Scheduled Castes. Ultimately, he agreed to give up the claim for separate electorate for the Scheduled castes and consented to retain the system of joint electorate along with the other communities of the Hindu society. Gandhiji on his part liberally conceded to increase the number of reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes from 78, as it was fixed in the Communal Award to a much higher figure of 148. This settlement between Gandhiji and Ambedkar is known in history as the Poona Pact.¹¹⁴ Ambedkar later wrote concerning why he succumbed to the moral appeal of Gandhiji. “There was before me a duty, which I owed as part of the common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfied to Gandhiji”.¹¹⁵

Till that time Ambedkar was looked upon as a sectional leader of the Depressed Class only, but after the Poona Pact everybody expected him to play the

¹¹³ Qtd. in Mowli, 66.

¹¹⁴ Agarwal, *Ambedkar: The Man and His Message*, 185.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

role of a national leader by joining the mainstream of the national movement for India's freedom. However, Ambedkar thought it to be more prudent to rely on the gesture of the British Raj for enhancing the interests of the Scheduled Castes, although his policy was not wholly supported by his own community in recording their verdict in the general election of 1937.¹¹⁶

Ambedkar might have been criticized for showing an obsession on issues pertaining to the interests of the Scheduled Castes. But he could never be accused of not being a true Indian and a genuine nationalist.

5.4 Constitutional Safeguard

In his changed evaluation of the new political realities Ambedkar decided to enter into the constituent Assembly for making efforts to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes by using this highest forum of democratic decision-making. In his maiden speech, he made a remarkable critical analysis of the discourse of Pandit Nehru when the latter moved the main resolution on the aims and objectives of the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar's style of delivery, constitutional acumen, moderate approach, and nationalist perspectives deeply impressed the Members of the constituent Assembly. He was soon appointed a member of the Seven-Member Drafting Committee for the preparation of the Constitution and then made its Chairman. It was not an act of any concession to assuage the sentiments of the Scheduled Castes that this highest position in the preparation body of the Constitution was given to Ambedkar. It was done in genuine appreciation of his exceptional ability to handle the stupendous task of framing the Constitution of India.¹¹⁷

It has been admitted by all that Ambedkar played the role of the principal architect of the Constitution of free India. He was advised, assisted and guided on many issues by two other architects namely Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel who conceptualized the basic principles, provisions and objectives of the Constitution. It was the moment of highest achievement and happiness for Ambedkar, when the resolutions on Directive Principles and Fundamental Constitution declare: "The State

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 187.

shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste sex place of birth or any of them.”¹¹⁸

Article 21 says: “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”¹¹⁹

Again Article 17 of the Constitution states: “Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Its enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.”¹²⁰

It is indeed like a charter of legal rights of liberty for the untouchables. A Scheduled caste member of the Constituent Assembly significantly observed after the adoption of the constitution:

It is an irony of fate that the man who was driven from one school to another, who was forced to take his lesson outside the classroom, has been entrusted with the great job of framing the constitution of free and independent India, and it is he who finally dealt a fatal death-blow to the custom of untouchability, of which he was himself a victim in his younger days.¹²¹

After the adoption of the constitution, all the Members of the Constituent Assembly showered lavish praises on Ambedkar. In reply, he said in all humility:

I came into the Constituent Assembly with no greater aspiration than the safeguard the interest of the Scheduled Castes. I had not the remotest idea that I would be called upon to undertake more responsible function. I am grateful to the Constituent Assembly and Drafting Committee for reposing so much trust and confidence in me and giving me.¹²²

Ambedkar adopted several means for the upliftment and betterment of the untouchables. Institutions like *Bahishkrut Hitkarni Sabha* (Depressed Classes' Welfare Association), Siddharth College and Millind College are imparting education based on equality for all the people of all sections. Even today, his dream of classless society is being carried through such institutions.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 188.

¹²² Qtd. in Agarwal, 188.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Ambedkar, Babasaheb. *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*.

Bombay: Thacker, 1943.

---. *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, Maharashtra: Education Department, 1989.

---. *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, Maharashtra: Education Department, 1990.

Secondary Sources

Agarwal, Sudarhan, ed. *Dr. Ambedkar: The Man and His Message*. New Delhi:

Prentice Hall, 1991.

Chalam, K.S, ed. *Relevance of Ambedkarism in India*. Jaipur: Rawat Publication,

1993.

Dalal, Suresh. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Madras: University of Madras, 1998.

Deliege, Robert. *The World of the Untouchables*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Dhanwan, S.K. *Dr. Ambedkar: A Select Profile*. Delhi: Wave, 1991.

Jatava, D.R, *Dr. Ambedkar: Social Philosophy*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1997.

Keer, Dhananjay. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan,

1990.

Kadam, K. N, ed. *Ambedkar and the Significance of His Movement*. London:

Sangam, 1991.

Mowli, V. Chandra. *Dr. Ambedkar: Man and His Vision*. Sterling, 1990.

Nirmal, P. Arvind. *Dr. Ambedkar: A Centenary Tribute*. Madras: Gurukul

Theological College, 1991.

Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchables to Dalit*. New Dehli: Manohar, 2001.

Magazine

Rawat, V.B. "Justice Delayed Justice Denied," *Communalism Combat*, January 2005,

25-27.

Bharati, Ashok. "Tsunami and Shame," *Communalism Combat*, January 2005, 20-22.

Gatade, Subhash. "Calamity and Prejudice," *Mainstream*, January 29, 2005, 11-15.