

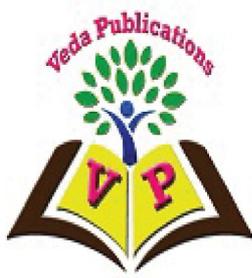


DECONSTRUCTION OF CASTE SYSTEM IN THE LIGHT OF AMBEDKARISM

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ABSTRACT

The paper entitled "Deconstruction of Caste System in the Light of Ambedkarism" is an attempt to explore the concept of caste system and the plight of the untouchables. While focusing on the ideology of Bharat Ratna Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, it also tries to draw parallelisms and contradictions between Ambedkarism and Gandhism. Besides underlining the determinism that made Ambedkar a Messiah for Indian pariahs, the article analyses the complexities interwoven with the deconstruction of the caste system.

Key Words: Ambedkarism, Caste and Varna, Hindu Society, Gandhism.

One of the precincts of the postmodernism is that the binaries such as virtue/vice, good/bad, man/woman, mind/matter, high/low, etc. are not natural differences but socially approved structures intended to serve the purpose of marginalization as well as sanctioning certain privileges of preening supremacy over others. This undeniably results in colonialism, racism, gender bias and many other issues that do not augur well with the wellbeing of any society and untouchability is no exception to this phenomenon in Indian contextuality of yesteryears.

The "varna-dharma" with its succinct source being "Manusmriti," ascribed admittance to affluence, authority, and advantage to certain sections of the society solely based on their respective occupations which gave rise to social stratification. Regrettably, the subjects at the lowest rung of this stratification remained untouchables or outcastes. The generations after generations continued to be throttled, smothered, annihilated by the omnipotent and vicious tentacles of untouchability until many a great warrior like Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar emerged on the scene taking cudgels to restore their identity and dignity.

Ambedkar, fondly known as Babasaheb, is not just a visionary, revolutionary, reformer, icon of knowledge but a liberating force and sustaining source of victims of marginalization. Boi Bheemanna rightly points out while paying rich tributes to Ambedkarism which stands as a towering structure, providing shelter and assuaging the grief-stricken hearts of "dalits" that had Ambedkar not been born, the dumb beasts (dalits) would have sought shelter nowhere. The Modern Buddha, in his mission to democratize the society, embraced Buddhism which according to him is not a religion but scientific way of life. His social, political and philosophical writings determined the destiny for many who swerved away from the path of truth and lawfulness.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar remained as an incessant source of inspiration and a beacon of hope for the underprivileged and the downtrodden sections of the society. The founding of All India Samatha Sainikdal for instilling the sense of security among the untouchables, Mahad Satyagrah for allowing the untouchables to draw water from the Chavdar Lake, Nasik's Kalaram Movement for the entry of the

outcastes into the temple are noteworthy measures in the process of awakening consciousness of the dalits.

His biweeklies "Bahishkrit Bharat" and "Mooknayak" voicing his concerns for the underdog, ascertained the rights for the deprived sections of the society and the means for achieving them. His famous contention in Yeola Conference on October 13, 1935 to a gathering of about 10,000 untouchables reminds the readers of the hideous nature of caste system in Hinduism.

Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu Untouchable - there was nothing I could do to prevent it. However, it is well within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu.

(Ambedkar: *Awakening India's Social Conscience*, 201)

Gandhiji's reaction to Dr Ambedkar's embracing of Buddhism may be attributed to the differences of ideologies between Gandhism and Ambedkarism. Gandhiji opined:

Religion is not like a house or cloak which can be changed at will. It is an integral part of one's own self, rather than of the body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's creator and whilst the body perishes and it is the religion that persists even after death. I am convinced that a change of faith will not serve the cause which they have at heart. (203)

According to Ambedkar "caste," a concrete inequality, is nothing but a "state of mind, the disease of mind." He calls untouchability among Hindus a "unique phenomenon" which is not to be found across the globe. No society anywhere in the world either Primitive, Ancient or Modern has witnessed this phenomenon.

Ambedkar says that the Hindu society is the maternity of inequalities. It is like a pillar without any staircase. It houses different houses for different castes. Each person is destined to be born and dead in the respective houses. The people in the lower houses can't go up however efficient they are and simply the

inefficient of the upper houses cannot come down.
This is graded inequality engulfing the Hindu society.

Ambedkar questions vehemently that how a person who rejects caste that is 'Varna' can call himself a Hindu because caste and 'Varna' are convertible terms and 'Varna' is an integral part of Shastras that define Hinduism. His confrontation with Mahatma Gandhi on the issues of sainthood, casteism, and politics obviously speaks of his undaunted will and courage in the struggle of emancipation of the untouchables. He questions the Mahatma's means of spiritualizing politics and asks why the Mahatma is always supporting Caste and Varna. He feels that the Mahatma is scared of losing his position in politics subsequent of his opposition to casteism.

As long as politics finds its nourishment in casteism and the leaders are committed to the false notions of nurturing ideologies of their parties, the unequal resonance in social structure continues to be felt though not overtly. Andre Beteille in his article "The Peculiar Tenacity of Caste" says that "Where caste consciousness was dying down, it was brought back to life by the massive campaigns that became part of every election." (*Caste and Race: Equations of Marginalization*, 69)

As part of his cardinal principles of reforms, Dr Ambedkar suggests that

the Hindus should consider that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing sanatan: that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society. In a changing society, there must be a constant revolution of old values; the Hindus must realize that if there must be standards to measure the acts of men, there must also be readiness to revise those standards. (*Ambedkar: Awakening India's*

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