

## **The Transition of Social Reformers: in the context of Scheduled Castes' Development**

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*The caste system is one of the unique features of Indian social structure and social life. And the occupational structure was related with caste system. The caste system gave rise to hierarchical, gradation and social discrimination regarding privileges, marriage, social intercourse, choice of occupation. The movement of the saints was mainly religious and cultural. It did not tackle the fundamental problems of social life; the rationalizing effect of English education gave rise to number of reform movements. Among these Dr. Babaseaheb Ambedkar suffered the agonies of caste discrimination in his educational and social life. He started many movements for the lower castes (Dalits) to make aware of their pathetic condition. So this an article has focused on the transition of social reformer in the context of Scheduled Castes upliftment.*

**[Key words: Scheduled Caste, Social Discrimination, Untouchable, Non-Brahmin movement. Occupation]**

**H**indu society has been divided on the basis of caste system and religion. An each caste found its place in the hierarchy in accordance with the rules of purity and pollution. Occupations, food, materials and even persons were ranged on a scale from purest to most impure. Therefore, the caste system is one of the unique features of Indian social structure and social life. On the one hand, the term of caste is used to describe in the broadest sense, the total system of social stratification and on the other hand, it is used to denote three, perhaps, more or less distinct aspects of this total system, i. e. *i. Varna*, *ii Jati* and *iii Gotra*. *Varna* is not the same

thing as *jati* the former repenting the four-fold division or groups of society. The main thing is that, “the Caste System is not merely a division of labourers which quite different form division of labour-it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other.” (Ambedkar: 1979: 47.)

Many Indian and foreign scholars devoted to caste study as Risley, Hutton, Bougle, Celestin etc. and the Indian scholars Majumdar and Madan, Ketkar, Karve, Beteille, Ghurye studied the caste structure. About the caste and occupation the Ibbetson views that “the fundamental idea, which lay at the root of the institution in its inception, was the hereditary nature of occupation.” (Ibbetson: 1916: 2) Toynbee says, “the Depressed classes of India are typical example of ‘Internal Proletariat, namely people who are in the society but not of the society’”. (Toynbee: 1949:375) Srinivas defines, “caste as a hereditary endogamous localized group having a traditional association with an occupation and is graded in hierarchy depending on the occupation though agriculture is common (in villages) to all castes from Brahmins to untouchables.” (Srinivas: 1952: 32) Dumont’s views that, “The caste system comprises the specialisation and interdependence of the constituent groups.” (Dumont: 1966: 92,) Karve reviews that, “association between caste and occupational structure closest by identifying some of the groups of occupational specialists and some caste designations indicating their occupations. However there are two conflicting views about the relationship between the caste system and its occupational choice”. (Karve: 1958:401-407) Ghurye views that, “the caste system not only assigns a definite occupation to each individual but also imposes certain restrictions on the change of occupation. On the other hand, the opposite view point is that the caste system has been dynamic in nature.” (Ghurye: 1950:15-17) Hutton also mentioned that, the castes are derived from tribal or racial elements. (Hutton: 1981:2)

### **Caste and Occupational Prohibition**

In the traditional period, the occupational structure was related with caste system and the relationship between caste and occupation was particularly closed in the case of Shudra people. The most unclean and least remunerative occupations were assigned to them. Nesfield views that, “the occupation is regarded as the exclusive basis of caste distinction. (Nesfield: 1885:106)

The Sociologists and Anthropologists have brought out an aspect of the co-relation between caste and occupation, on the one hand, with regard to certain caste groups and at the same time the flexibility and facility for occupational mobility, which was structured within the caste system. Therefore, each caste followed its traditional occupation, which was prescribed to *Shastras* by the four *Varnas*. Ghurye views, "the caste system gave rise to hierarchical, gradation and social discrimination regarding privileges, marriage, social intercourse, choice of occupation, etc. Over the centuries, this has led to frustration and bitterness and inter-caste tensions within the system. (Ghurye.1959)

In this way the law of *Manu* which occupation prohibited to *Shudras* till 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the *Marathas* were the military caste of the *Maratha*-country, formed into a caste from the cultivators, shepherds and herdsmen, who took service under *Shivaji Maharaja* and subsequent *Maratha* leaders. And the stubborn resistance offered by *Prabhu-kayastha* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century foiled the Brahmanical efforts. After that, "the *Maratha* and *Mali* who took up agriculture are spread all over *Maratha*-country and joined hands with *Marathas* in protesting against Brahmanic supremacy in the state". (Mathew.1986:20)

### **The Transition of Social Reformers**

Since the time of Buddha, attempts have been made by the social reforms to purge the Hindu society of the evils of the caste system and uplift the social position of the lowest rank in the society. "After Buddha, successive social reformers worked for cleaning the Hindu society of the effects of the caste system such as *Ramanuj*, great *Vaisanava Acharya*, *Basava*, *Visaivnanism*, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century in Karnataka. (Chatterjee.1996:115-116) Between 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century *Ramandanda*, *Kabir*, *Rohidas*, *Chaitany*, *Eknath* and *Tukaram* tried to bring equality through the access of worship to God. These saints-poets of Maharashtra tried to show that there was no difference between a Brahmin and an untouchable in the kingdom of God. "The movement of the saints was mainly religious and cultural. It did not tackle the fundamental problems of social life; and it did not have the backing of economic struggles like that of the reformation in Europe. The '*Varkari*' sect opened the way for the spiritual development of women and *Shudras*

without touching the fabric of the caste system or the authority of the '*shastras*'. (Sardar. 1969:16)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century new concepts such as 'Social justice' and 'Political rights' were brought by the Indian renaissance, which represented the dawn between the passing of the mediaeval age and the advent of the modern. The renaissance in Bengal produced two men, *Raja Rammohan Roy* and *Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar*, who represented all the historical characteristics of the Indian Renaissance. The results of English education brought greater changes in the minds of educated Hindus than the previous three thousand years. Therefore the rationalising effect of English education gave rise to number of reform movements. The English educated people in India found that, "Indian society was organised on the basis of hierarchy, which was quite inconsistent with the high ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, thrown up by the French Revolution. (Chatterjee. 1996:119) "Most of the social reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like *Raja Rammohan Roy*, *Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar*, *Keshav Chandra Sen*, *Shivanath Shastri*, *Atmaram Pandurang*, *M. G. Ranade* and *Gopal Krishana Gokhale* came from the highest Caste-Brahmin and Kayastha. The problems they attempted to solve were sati, infanticide, infant marriage, unrestricted polygamy, shaving of widows, widow-marriage etc. In fact these were really problems, which affected their mothers and sisters. (Mujumdar. 260-61)

These social reformers who belonged to higher castes did not take up the cause of removal of untouchability and other manifestations of social inequalities, which concerned the lower rung of the society most. However, "the Brahmin leadership did not fail essentially to initiate a radical change within the Brahmin community, to loosen its traditionalism and orthodoxy; nor did it succeed in creating a confidence about its intentions in the non-Brahmin castes". (Patwardhan. 1973:113) In this period the *Brahmo* and *Arya samaj* movements started in Bengal and Punjab. In Maharashtra such stalwart individual like *Jambhekar*, *Lokhitwadi* (G. H. *Deshmukh*), *Ranade*, *Phule*, *Agarkar* and *Bhandarkar* started it. The attempts to reform came from two distinct social groups, one from the Brahmins themselves, and the other from the majority caste groups of the non-Brahmin communities like the *Kunbis*, *Malis* and *Marathas*.

*Jyotirao Govindrao Phule* (b1827-d1890) of Poona was the pioneer in the modern times of the movement calculated "to improve the condition of and to secure social equality to the erstwhile untouchable and unapproachable classes". (Ghurye.1969:325) *Phule* established the '*Satya Shodhak Samaj*' in 1873 with the avowed aim of liberating the non-Brahmins from the strangle hold of the Brahmins, Priests and others. He opened schools for them. He called upon the people to revolt against Hindu caste Gods and the degrading religious practices. He advocated "the principle of adequate representation for members of all castes in public services for the first time". (Singh. 1996:37) Meanwhile *Shahu Maharaja* who king of *Kolhapur* presidency started the reservation policy for Backward Classes and built the hostels for students in *Kolhapur*. In the same year *Shivaram Janaba Kamble* called conference of *Mahars* at *Saswad* in the year of 1902 and asked for their inclusion in Military and Police Services. He also fought against the *Devdasi* system prevailing among the *Mahar* and *Mang* castes. *Vithal Ramji Shinde* also silently worked and wrote much on untouchability and he started the '*Depressed Classes Mission*' in 1906. *Karmveer Bhaurao Patil* followed the footsteps of *Phule* and started a boarding school for *Mahars* in *Satara*.

In this way, in *Maharashtra* the non-Brahmin movement virtually ended the supremacy of the Brahmins. The confrontation of two reform movements one which was initiated and led by Brahmins and the other initiated by the educated Marathas, Malis and other non-Brahmins created a climax of social change. This revolt of the untouchables in the form of struggle was mainly due to the realisation that the petitions and memorials are not adequate to move the Hindus. The role of the British-Indian law, which gave the untouchables the rights to wear any kind of clothes or ornaments and to use public services such as wells, schools, buses, trams, railways, Public offices etc. However, proved to be vital in their upliftment in spite of these enabling legal provisions, the untouchables were denied the basic human rights and civil rights.

### **Caste Discrimination in the British Period**

In the British period under the old regime of caste certain sections of Hindu society that were regarded as untouchables were devoid of many of the civil rights. in the field of education, "in 1856 the Government of *Bombay* had to consider the case of *Mahar* boy,

who was refused admission to the Government school at Dharwar". (Ghurye.1969:275) After that, "the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra was a protest movement against the political, economical and cultural domination of Brahmins over non-Brahmins. It rose, when *Jotiba Phule* founded the *Satyashodak Samaj* in 1873". (Mathew.1986:20)

For the military service lower caste persons were recruited into armies of Peshvas and later into East India Company. "In the armies of Maratha chiefs, all the infantrymen were of lower castes and were treated with disdain". (Robertson. 1938:60) Their military services, thus, opened up channels of vertical mobility for new occupations. Industrialisation and urbanisation brought them new changes. The introduction of railways and buses, establishment of modern industries and labour market gave new occupation to lower caste. "Therefore in 1872, the untouchable's percentage in Bombay mills was only one and in city their percentage was below 5 but by 1921, both in city and mill labour; were 12 per cent". (Morris.1965:74)

The new occupational roles thus, provided upliftment for the SCs or lower castes. New occupations encouraged them toward education and lack of education was one of the factors, which restricted them to low occupations. At the time Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was started movement for human rights since 1920 and he was formed 'All India Scheduled Castes Federation' (AISCF) in July 1942 and a conference held at Nagpur for the 'Depressed Classes' and "the principles enunciated in the AISCF manifesto were rigorous, economical and political freedom, right to equality of opportunity, state responsibility to make every Indian free from want and fear, maintenance of liberty, equality and fraternity, redemption from oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class and of nation-by-nation and parliamentary system of Government". (Kuber.1973: 222.)

### **The contribution of Dr. Ambedkar**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar belonged to the so-called lower caste in India. Hence, he suffered the agonies of caste discrimination in his educational and social life. He started many movements for the lower castes (Dalits) to make aware of their pathetic condition. He struggled for the equal rights to the lower castes in India. Therefore, his contribution played a vital role in the

struggle of lower castes in Maharashtra. When Ambedkar returned from London in 1920, he started a weekly '*Mooknayak*' (Leader of the Dumb) to voice the woes of the 'Depressed Classes' of India. Ambedkar had established the '*Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha*' on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1924, through which he wanted to "light the fire of self-help and Self-respect among the untouchables and wished to bring all untouchables under one banner". When the Bombay Government passed a resolution to the effect that the untouchable classes are allowed to use public wells and *Dharmshalas* in 1923. Dr. Ambedkar organised the untouchables to assert their legal right to take water from the *Chowdar* water Tank at Mahad in Maharashtra. In this connection, a conference was held during 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> March 1927 at Mahad. He addressed 10,000 delegates who attended to abandon their *watans*. After the conference Ambedkar led all the delegates to the *Chowdar* water tank at Mahad. "Ambedkar was finally successful in this democratic Satyagraha and won the case in the court". (Ambedkar: 252) The temple entry movement, which started with the *Voikkaom Satyagraha* in 1924 in Travancore State, was spreading to different parts of the country. After the successful Satyagraha, Dr. Ambedkar launched the struggle for temple entry at *Parvati*, Poona in 1929 and *Kalaram* Temple at Nashik on 2 March 1930.

The British Government organised Round Table Conferences in London in 1930, 1931 and 1932. In these conferences Ambedkar represented the untouchables. The second Round Table conference, held in 1931, was very important. Gandhi who not only refused to consider a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes but also opposed any form of special representation involving reserved seats. But Ambedkar convinced the British Government; therefore the Government announced a decision regarding representation of untouchables with a separate electorate, which, it was hoped, would affect a compromise between the congress and Ambedkar. Gandhi's response to this event was to enter a "fast unto death" on September 20, 1932, which resulted in what is known as the 'Poona pact' for the political representation. Actually the seats in the legislatures reduced up to 71 after Poona pact where as the British Govt. had given 148 seats to the *Harijans*.

The leaders of the Depressed Classes held a conference at Yewla (Nashik) on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1935 to review the political and social

situation in the light of their fifteen years old struggle and the ensuing constitutional reforms. Then Ambedkar declared: "Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu untouchable I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu untouchable". (Keer. 1994:253) Dr. Ambedkar concluded that the only way to abolish untouchability and to get humane treatment, equality and liberty was to leave the Hindu fold and Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party to guard the interests of the depressed classes.

One of the most powerful messages of Dr. Ambedkar is abolition of caste. Dr. Ambedkar was invited for the conference organised by '*Jat-Pat Todak Mandal*' of Lahor in 1936. The views expressed regarding annihilation of caste which depend on religion, in the historical speech prepared by Dr. Ambedkar for the conference, were unbearable to the reception committee. Hence, Dr. Ambedkar was requested by the committee to make certain changes in his speech but Dr. Ambedkar denied to-do so. As a result the conference stood cancelled.

Dr. Ambedkar also started Marathi newspapers like '*Mooknayak*', '*Bahiskrit Bharat*', '*Prabhuddha Bharat*' and '*Janata*' etc., and propagated his philosophy of social and political equality. Ambedkar formed 'All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF) in July 1942, in the conference held at 'Nagpur' for the 'Depressed Classes' However, it could not become a powerful organisation through the country mainly because of lack of resources and the machinery necessary for making the organisation strong and powerful.

He realised the need of a good education institute for the Depressed Classes. So he founded 'People's Education Society' and started colleges in Bombay and Aurangabad. He actively engaged in the drafting the Constitution of India, which was successfully passed in the Parliament in 1949. However, the Hindu code Bill that he proposed in the parliament was rejected and therefore he resigned his ministry from Nehru's cabinet.

Later he engaged himself in the thoughts of Buddhism and came out with the book entitled 'Buddha and his Dhamma' in February 1956. Finally as promised, he embraced Buddhism along with his wife and four lack followers on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1956 at Nagpur. In this way Babasaheb struggled almost single handily for Justice and Reason, at a time when the Society was more Conservative.

He fought for Equality and to build Fraternity at a time when social interactions of caste Hindus with the Depressed Classes were unheard of. He talked about Liberty and Freedom when and the number of educated employees and earning individuals were very small, with almost Nil Representations from the Depressed Classes. Yet, there were many enlightened caste Hindus who supported Babasaheb wholeheartedly, worked with him and even helped him in his struggles against the stupidity, superstition, illogical prejudices and dogmas of the conservative Hindus and their leaders. As a result of Babasaheb's Struggles - in front of the alien Imperial British Government, which was free from caste divisions, and hence could afford to be neutral, reasonably reasonable, unbiased and just some of the educated liberal Hindus began to see reason, the logic and force of righteousness in the claims and demands of Babasaheb, and the endless Sufferings and Struggles of the millions of Depressed Classes.

### **Social Mobility among SCs**

Migration is one of the determinants of social mobility. The number of studies in different countries and India also suggest that, the related processes of urbanization and migration are major sources of social as well as occupational mobility. They indicated that, migration from rural areas and smaller communities to metropolitan centres influence the placement of the occupational structure in the same way when large-scale immigration takes place. One of the migration models explains that, the number of persons used to go for number of employment opportunities at the metropolitan centres. Mainly economic forces generate most of possibilities. There are several reasons that are non-economical in nature. These can be the attraction of city life and the opportunities of adopting new occupation, communication facilities in modern society, especially in an urban area. Migration of rural to urban as well as the rural area strains some communication, especially downtrodden people.

In the last fifty-six years, the results of various schemes, which were declared and implemented by Government to improve the educational condition of the SCs, are expected to benefit the SCs. However, Government has spent large amounts of money for education. Though the literacy rate has been increasing slowly many SCs are aware that, education is the key to social as well as

occupational mobility and the social situation shows that, after independence the second and third generation of SCs is highly mobile as compared to their fathers' generation. It is the result of the educational and job-reservation policy provided by the Government of Maharashtra and Government of India. The occupational mobility of third generation is also highly mobile as compared to the second generation. The result is that, their educational and economical position is better than that of their fathers. Another thing is that, the SC communities are more aware about the educational and occupational development, their rights and the discriminations.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the above, at the time of Independence in 1947, Adoption of the Constitution in 1949, and its enforcement in 1950, the unacceptable SC & ST could find some accommodation and a little scope for their survival amidst the Hindus. For, the caste Hindus had come to develop some pity for SCs & STs, particularly for those from their own States, ancestral Home-Towns, parental Villages and Native Districts, though the SC & ST could not come near or close or be touched. But during the last 50 years, the equation had undergone a sea change, and had grown completely reverse. Today, while SC & ST can in public shake hands, sit and even dine together with the caste Hindus like brothers or family members, the later had come to develop a great aversion and secretly harbours uncontrollable hidden hatred and unspoken enmity in their hearts - which shows off and appears at unexpected moments.

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