CHAPTER

V

CASTE SYSTEM

The Problem of Untouchability

In the beginning this social division must have been according to the work they undertake. This can be explained with a simple example like - among the four brothers of a family, one becomes teacher, one soldier, the third a shopkeeper and the last an ordinary worker. It was not a rigid caste divide then. These roles were interchangeable. Some like Valmiki, though born low caste was Brahmashri. Parashuram was of a Brahmin descent, but he wielded weapons. Later this concept changed and Brahmin’s son became a Brahmin though he is illiterate. Similarly Bhimrao Ambedkar excelled in all branches of knowledge, still he remained untouchable.

Every organised society is stratified. Most societies of the world have had their own type of what world calls ‘the lowly’. The Romans had their Plebeians, the Spartans their ‘helots’, the British their villains, the Egyptians, their slaves, the Americans their Negroes and the Germans their Jews. Likewise the Hindus have the ‘untouchables’. Slavery, serfdom, villeinage have all
vanished, but untouchability still exists. The practice of untouchability from which the Scheduled Caste people have been suffering is the reflection of the state of affairs of more than $\frac{1}{6}$th of the population of this country. For no sins of theirs a large section of Indian population is suffering from a number of disabilities arising out of untouchability.

Logically speaking there is no rationale behind untouchability and it must go. As Gandhiji said, it must become a thing of the past. Ambedkar and Gandhiji did their best to condemn the practice and to campaign against it. The Constitution of independent India declares in an unequivocal voice that untouchability is abolished and its practice in any manner is punishable. Various welfare measures are also launched by the Central and State Governments to uplift the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

**Scheduled Castes – Origin of the Term**

The term ‘Scheduled Castes’ is a politico-legal one. It was coined by the Simon Commission in 1928 and then by Government of India Act 1935. The word ‘Schedule’ refers to a ‘list’ or ‘table’. The Government of India Act 1935, listed out or scheduled a few of the castes as the most deprived ones which required some
special attention. This list of castes was designated as 'Scheduled Castes'. When India became independent, this term was adopted by the Constitution for the purpose of providing them some special facilities and constitutional guarantees.

All the Scheduled Castes are not Untouchables

It has to be noted that all the Scheduled Castes are not untouchables. The list of Scheduled Castes also includes 'touchable' castes. Almost 80 per cent of the Scheduled Castes are untouchables suffering from various kinds of disabilities. However, people in general use the term 'Scheduled Castes' to mean untouchable without making any difference between the touchables and untouchables. In this study also it is used in the same way.

The term 'Scheduled Castes' is nowhere defined in Constitution. Article 341 and 342 of the Constitution empower the President of India in consultation with State Governments to notify by an order, the castes, races and tribes, which can be deemed as 'Scheduled Castes'.

Sociologists have tried to define the term in their own way. One can consider here the definitions of D.N.Majumdar and G.S. Ghurye.
1. D.N. Majumdar uses the term 'Scheduled Castes' to refer mainly to the untouchable castes. He defines, 'The untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes'.

2. G.S. Ghurye: Scheduled Castes are those groups which are named in the Scheduled Castes Order in force from time to time.

3. In simple words, the term can be defined this way: the term Scheduled Castes which comprises of the bulk of the 'untouchable castes', includes all those groups which are subject to some disabilities in major fields of life social, religious, educational, economic and political.

Scheduled Castes Population

The population of the Scheduled Castes has been steadily increasing. According to 1941 Census report, their population was about 18 million and it increased to 140 million as per 1991 Census report. This would constitute 16.18 per cent of the total population of India. The Scheduled Caste people are not to be seen in Nagaland, Andaman Nicobar and Lakshadweep. Their number is almost insignificant in Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. In the remaining states,
there is not a single taluk in which Scheduled Caste people are not found.

As per 1981 and 1991 Census reports, about two thirds of the Scheduled Castes live in six states only. The highest number of Scheduled Castes is found in Uttar Pradesh (22.3 per cent) of the total Scheduled Castes population in the country followed by West Bengal (11.4 per cent), Bihar (9.6 per cent), Tamil Nadu (8.5 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (7.6 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh (7.0 per cent). As per the 1991 Census report, in Karnataka, there are 73,69,279 Scheduled Castes (5.3 per cent of the State’s total population) and majority of them live in rural areas.

Faster Growth of the Scheduled Castes Population

The number of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes has grown faster in proportion, during 1981-1991, than other people in the country put together. While the overall growth of population during the decade was 23.79 per cent, it was much higher in the case of Scheduled Castes, i.e., 30 per cent.¹

Concentration of Scheduled Castes in the Rural Areas

About 84 to 85 per cent of the Scheduled Castes people live in rural areas and about 80 per cent of them depend on
agriculture. According to a survey, almost 50 per cent of the Scheduled Castes people are agricultural workers and they would constitute about $1/3$ of the total number of agricultural workers in the country. Majority of them do not own any land. Of those who possess land, 68.8 per cent of them own land, which is less than one hectare in size. About $2/3$ of the bonded labourers are from the Scheduled Castes. Their literacy level is extremely low. It was 21.4 per cent in 1981 as against the all India average of 41.3 per cent (exclusive of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).²

The Scheduled Caste people, who belong to the rural areas, virtually live as agricultural labourers, tenants and marginal farmers. Almost all persons engaged in jobs like sweeping, scavenging and tanning belong to the Scheduled Castes. In addition to the majority of agricultural labourers, one also finds among them, good number of leather workers, weavers, fishermen, toddy-tappers, basket/rope shoe-makers, liquor manufacturers, drummers, carpenters, ironsmiths and some following petty occupations. The following Table-1 shows increase in Scheduled Castes population according to Census reports.
TABLE -1
Increase in Scheduled Castes Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Census</th>
<th>Total population of Scheduled Castes in million</th>
<th>Percentage of the Scheduled Castes population out of the total population</th>
<th>Increase in percentage from decade to decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>104.75</td>
<td>15.75</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>140.0</td>
<td>16.48</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Problem of Untouchability

People who constitute the bottom most place in the Indian social stratification are often regarded as ‘untouchables’. All of them come under the category of ‘Scheduled Castes’ according to our Constitution. The word ‘untouchable’ applies to the despised and degraded section of the Indian population. Untouchability is a mass phenomenon of group prejudices and discrimination affecting about 140 million people. It is an ignoble practice associated with the Indian caste system.

‘Untouchability’ is a practice in which some lower caste people are kept at a distance, denied social equality and made to suffer from some disabilities. Their touch is considered to be
contaminating or polluting the higher caste people rendering them impure to do any social or religious activity till they bathe.

The practice of untouchability is a stigma attached to the Indian society. It is an age-old practice and has its roots deep down in our social and religious system. Gandhiji regarded this practice as 'a leper wound in the whole body of Hindu politic'. He even considered it, 'the most hateful expression of caste'. He carried on a campaign against it throughout his life. Though the practice of untouchability, in one form or another, has been there in many other countries of the world. It has taken its ugliest shape in India. Millions of people have suffered from it and the suffering still continues though with less intensity.

Some Ancient References to 'Untouchable' Castes

The untouchable castes were called by different names such as chandalas, panchamas, svapachas, antyajas, atishudras, during early days.

Vedic literature also makes a mention of some 'impure' groups, which were there as early as 800 B.C. People born of the prohibited 'pratiloma' (marriage of higher Varna woman with the man of lower Varna) marriage belonged to that category and were called 'chandalas', 'svapachas' and so on. In simple words,
the chandalas who were regarded as 'untouchables' were the children of the most hated union of a Brahmin female with a Shudra male. The 'pratiloma' form of marriage was not approved by the scriptures.

Shastrakara Manu was of the opinion that the progeny of the most hated pratiloma union would become chandalas or untouchables. In the Vedic literature, we find the mention of chandalas as an ethnic group originating from inter-breeding of the higher caste or Varna female (mostly Brahmin) and lower caste or Varna male (mostly Shudra).

Patanjali, yet another dharmashastrakara, considered chandalas as a variety of shudras.

Most of the dharmashstrakaras considered the chandalas as forming a fifth category (that is outside the four Varnas) and called them panchamas. The panchamas were 'untouchables'. Since they were outside the Varna system.

Alberuni has referred to these 'untouchables' as a social group called 'antyaja' constituting the last and the lowest position in the society. Their socio-economic life was worse than that of the Shudras (of the Varna category) and hence they were called 'atishudras'.

Origin of Untouchability

It is difficult to estimate the exact period in which the practice of untouchability originated. Still it can be said that it existed in India even 2000 years ago. Thus untouchables have been in existence for more than 2000 years. These are different theories of origin of untouchability. It is better to consider briefly some of these theories.

i) Traditional Theory

According to Manu, the prohibited pratiloma marriage was the cause of the origin of untouchability. Children, born out of such a marriage, were kept out of the Varna fold and were branded as chandalas who constituted an untouchable group. In the Chandukya Upanishad also there is reference to chandalas. In the Buddhist Jatakas, there is a mention of chandalas as the lowest caste people following the most degraded professions.

ii) Racial Theory

Sir Herbert Risley and Majumdar consider the origin of untouchability in a different way. They say that the Indo-Aryans regarded the aborigines of India as a kind of inferior human beings and addressed them as 'dasas' or 'dasyaus' meaning slaves
or servants. They also placed them in the lowest strata of the society and deprived them of all social and religious ceremonies. Majumdar argues that the disabilities of the so-called 'depressed castes are not ceremonial, but are founded on racial and cultural differences'.

iii) The Theory of Ceremonial/Occupational Purity

J.H.Hutton and G.S.Ghurye are in support of this theory. While analysing the origin of caste (also of untouchability), Hutton suggests that ideas of ceremonial purity were applied to aboriginal activities. According to Ghurye, 'Ideas of purity, whether occupational or ceremonial, which are found to be a factor in the genesis of the caste are the very soul of the idea of practice of untouchability'. Scholars like Laxman Shastri Joshi have also supported it.

iv) Occupational Theory

According to Nesfield, association with dirty and impure occupations gave rise to the feeling of untouchability. It means low social status attached to certain occupations is the cause of untouchability. It relates to impure occupations such as removal of human waste and carcass, leather works, spinning, tanning, scavenging.
There are also other explanations for the origin of untouchability. It is evident from all these theories that the caste system, to a very great extent, is responsible for the development of the feeling of untouchability. Conservation of the caste always supported the feeling of untouchability. The caste system also gave rise to the feeling that 'untouchables' are born into untouchable castes and remain so till their death. This feeling perpetuated untouchability. The practice of untouchability assumed different forms and proportions in the prolonged history of more than 2000 years.

Criteria of Untouchability

Untouchability in the Indian context has become hereditary. If a person is regarded or branded as 'untouchable' his life as 'untouchable' but his children also become 'untouchables'. Still it should be remembered that untouchability did not and does not arise by birth alone. Persons become outcastes and untouchables by being guilty of certain acts that amount to grave sins. Untouchability indicates not only a low place in the caste hierarchy together with the existence of social and religious disabilities, but also low economic position as well. Most of the scheduled castes are considered to be untouchables.
As C.B. Memoria has cited, ‘according to 1931 Census report, if a caste suffers from the following restrictions, it may be termed as an ‘untouchable’ caste.

i) Inability to be served by twice born or class Brahmins.

ii) Inability to be served by barbers, water carriers, tailors, hoteliers, etc., who serve caste Hindus.

iii) Inability to serve water to the caste Hindus.

iv) Inability to enter Hindu temples.

v) Inability to use public conveniences such as wells, schools.

vi) Inability to dissociate oneself from a despised occupation.

**Untouchability Within Untouchable Castes**

Certain anomalies are found among the so-called untouchable castes. D.N. Majumdar summarised the position of the depressed (untouchable) castes in 1940s in the following way.

These castes are not depressed in all states; the same caste may be ‘depressed’ in one but may not suffer from any social or political disability in another. In Madhya Pradesh the same caste
has different social rights and disabilities even in adjacent districts.

The disabilities are rigid where the depressed castes are numerically small and fewer or are on the decline where they are numerically strong.

Where the castes are all of the same ethnic stock or are largely so, social disabilities are not numerous and are usually confined to those functions, which are considered degrading.

Where the higher castes are in a minority and the depressed castes constitute the majority, the degree of ceremonial pollution observed is quite less and often we find few disabilities attached to the inferior castes.

Individual members of the depressed castes who have succeeded in life and who are wealthy and own property have been admitted to a higher social status.

Gradations among the Untouchables

'It is not to be imagined that within the circle of untouchability for instance, there are two sub-gradations and all untouchables are equal among themselves.' (1) Mahatma Gandhi himself wrote, 'All the various grades of untouchables are
untouchable among themselves, each superior grade considering the inferior grade as polluting as the highest class of the caste Hindus regard the worst grade of untouchables.⁶ (2) Example: A chamar thinks that he would be polluted by coming into physical contact with a Dom or a Bhangi. Untouchable castes such as Bhuyar, Byar, Khatik and Majhwar are very particular in keeping the castes they consider 'untouchables' at a distance.⁷

According to Sir Blunt, 'Eleven castes will not touch a Bhangi, seventeen will not touch a Chamar, ten will not touch a Dhakar, six will not touch a Dhobi or a Dom'. It is said that in Tamil Nadu alone there are not less than 80 sub-divisions, those at the top considering the less fortunate of their own brothers as untouchable.

Problems of Untouchable Castes

Majority of castes that come under the category of 'Scheduled Castes' are regarded as 'untouchables'. These untouchable castes have been suffering from various disabilities throughout the history. After independence, the practice of untouchability was declared unconstitutional, but the fact is that it still exists. The suffering of the untouchables have not come to an end. This problem cannot be solved by an Act of legislation.
According to Majumdar, 'the untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by the higher castes. Thus if the whole bases of untouchability are not destroyed, a simple provision for its legal status will bear sandy fruits'.

The untouchable castes have been suffering from various social, religious, legal, political, educational, economic and other disabilities. For centuries, they were denied political representation, legal rights, civic facilities, educational privileges and economic opportunities. During the British rule also no proper attention was paid to uplift the untouchables to relieve them from their bondage. Even today they are not completely free from the problem which made them to suffer from centuries. These problems can be grouped into three main categories, (i) social problems, (ii) economic problems and (iii) political problems.

1. Social Problems and Disabilities

The untouchable castes have suffered for centuries from a number of social problems and disabilities among which the following may be noted.
(i) Lowest Status in the Social Hierarchy

In the caste hierarchy the untouchable castes are ascribed the lowest status. They are considered to be 'unholy', 'inferior' and 'low' and are looked down by the other castes. They have been suffering from the stigma of 'untouchability'. Their very touch is considered to be polluting by the higher caste people. Hence, they have been subject to exploitation and humiliation. They have been treated as the servants of the other caste people. The untouchables have always served the other castes, but the attitude of other castes is of total indifference and contempt. They were kept at a distance from other caste people. In some instances (in south India) even the exact distance which an upper caste man was expected to keep between himself and the Harijans was specified. During the early times they were branded as Panchamas, Antyajas, Svapachas, Atishudras, Chandals, AVarnas, etc., and were given the bottom most place in society. The distinction that arose between Aryans and Anaryas, centuries ago, culminated in the practice of untouchability. Anaryas were branded as 'dasas' or servants and were kept at a distance. They were not given any good position in the army, politics and public life, but made to follow 'unclean' occupations such as scavenging, removing human waste and dead animals, tanning, shoe-making,
spinning, washing clothes, barbering, supplying water and so on. The physical touch of these people following 'unclean' occupations was considered enough to pollute the so-called upper caste (Varna) people. Thus the so-called 'untouchables' were not only kept at a distance but also denied of various civic facilities. Several denied of various civic facilities. Several disabilities were attributed to them.

(ii) Civic Disabilities

For a long time the untouchables were not allowed to use public places and avail of civic facilities such as - village wells, ponds, temples, hostels, schools, hospitals, lecture halls, dharmashalas, choultries. They were forced to live on the outskirts of the towns and village during the early days. Even today they are segregated from others spatially. They were not allowed to enter the houses of the higher castes. They were allowed to work as labourers during construction or repair, storing grains. But later the houses were purified by sprinkling cow urine or cow dung. In south India, restrictions were imposed on the mode of construction of their houses, types of dresses and patterns of their ornamentation. Some lower caste people were not allowed to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments and to milk cows. They were prohibited from covering
the upper part of their body. The services of barbers, washermen and tailors were refused to them. In the court of justice they had to shout from the pointed distance and take their chance of being heard.

(iii) Educational Disabilities

The untouchables were forbidden from taking up education during the early days. Sanskrit education was denied to them. Public schools and other educational institutions were closed for them. Even today majority of them are illiterate and ignorant.

The literacy level of scheduled castes is extremely poor (21.4 per cent in 1981). It is less than half of the national average (41.3 per cent). In States like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh their literacy level is less than 1/4ths of the national average. Female literacy is still poorer among them. In 1981 only 10.3 per cent of Scheduled Castes women were literate, while in Bihar Scheduled Castes women's literacy level stood the lowest minimum that is 2.5 per cent. At college level and university level and in professional courses only a very limited number of Scheduled Castes students are studying even after more than five decades of independence.
(iv) Religious Disabilities

The untouchables also suffer from religious disabilities even today. They are not allowed to enter temples in many places. Even after the successful campaign of Ambedkar, demanding the untouchables right to enter the Kalaram temple at Nasik in 1930, things have not improved. The Brahmins, who offer their priestly services to some lower castes, are not prepared to officiate the ceremonies of the 'untouchable' castes. They do not even bow to the deities of these 'untouchable' castes. The Vedic mantras, which are considered to be more pure, could not be listened to and chanted by the Harijans because of the taboos. They were only permitted to make use of the Upanishadic mantras which are considered to be less pure. Burial grounds were also denied to them in many places.

2. Economic Problems and Disabilities

The untouchables are economically backward and have been suffering from various economic disabilities also.

(i) No Right of Property Ownership

For centuries the untouchables were not allowed to have land and business of their own. It is only recently that their
ownership to the property has become recognised. The propertied people are comparatively less in them. Majority of them depend upon agriculture but only a few of them (hardly 28 per cent) own land.

(ii) Selection of Occupations Limited

The caste system imposes restrictions on the occupational choice of the members. The occupational choice was very much limited for the untouchables. They were not allowed to take up occupations, which were reserved for the upper caste people. They were forced to stick on the traditional inferior occupations such as curing hides, removing the human wastes, sweeping, scavenging, oil grinding, spinning, tanning, shoe-making, leather works, carrying the dead animals. These occupations were regarded as 'degraded' and 'inferior'.

(iii) Landless Labourers

Majority of untouchables are today working as landless labourers. More than 90.1 per cent of the agricultural labourers in India belong to the depressed classes which include the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. According to 1981 Census, more than 52 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers in rural areas are agricultural labourers. A large number of Scheduled Castes
families are in debts. Their indebtedness is increasing day by day. The Scheduled Castes are economically exploited by the upper caste people. Even today they are the lowest paid workers. Some of them continue to suffer as bonded labourers at the hands of the other higher caste people. The untouchables constituted 90 per cent of the total number of the bonded labourers found in India according to a recent report. It is also observed that a number of atrocities are committed against the untouchables because of economic reasons. For example: In 1977 as many as 10,879 atrocities were reported against them and the figure increased to 15,053 in 1978 registering an increase of 38.37 per cent. Though seats are reserved for them in Government departments, due to lack of eligibility they are not able to get into Government services.

3. Political Disabilities

The untouchables hardly participated in the political matters for centuries. They were not given any place in politics, administration and the general governance of India. They were not allowed to hold any public post. Political rights and representation were denied to them. Under the British rule, they were given the right to vote for the first time. After independence equality of political opportunities and rights have
been provided for the Scheduled Castes also. Politically, the Scheduled Castes are yet to become a decisive force.

The untouchables or the Scheduled Castes living in the city are trying to organise themselves in the form of 'Dalit Sangharsha Samiti' and such other organisation to fight for their rights. But the vast mass of rural Scheduled Castes are totally unorganised. Political parties such as 'The Republican Party of India', started by Ambedkar, 'Dalit Panthers Party' (of 1970s), 'Bahujana Samajavadi Party' (BSP of 1980s) are no doubt mobilising the Scheduled Castes but so far they have not been able to form a 'dalit lobby' or 'Harijan lobby' at the national level. Their political influence is mostly localised. Their total influence in the Indian politics is so far not very much impressive.

**Measures for the Upliftment of Scheduled Castes**

**Attempts for Eradication of Untouchability**

Ever since the time of the Buddha and Mahavira attempts have been made to remove the social disabilities of the degraded castes including untouchability. The Buddha and Mahavira said that caste is no bar to communion with God. In fact, Buddhism and Jainism rose as a challenge to the rigid caste system with all its evils. Thinkers and reformers like Basavanna, Kabiradas, Sant
Tukaram, Guru Nanak, Tulsidas, Ramdas, Namadeva, Santa Jnaneshwar and a host of others have advocated the removal of caste distinctions, including untouchability for the good of humanity. The Bhakti cult popularised by Purandara Das, Kanaka Das, Vadiraj and others, and the Veerashaivism established and propagated by Basanna contributed a great deal to the removal of untouchability.

During the British rule in the 19th and 20th centuries, a number of social reformers tried to eradicate untouchability. They launched movements against untouchability and built organisations to reform the Hindu society. Swami Vivekananda’s ‘Sri Ramakrishna Mission’, Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s ‘Brahma Samaj, Swami Dayananda Saraswati’s ‘Arya Samaj’, Atmaram Panduranga’s ‘Prarthana Samaj’, Anne Besant’s ‘Theosophical Society, Thakkar Bapa’s ‘Hairjan Sevan Sangha’, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar’s ‘Rashtreeya Swayam Sevak Sangha’, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar’s ‘All-India Scheduled Castes Federation’, Sri Nrayana Guru and S.N.D.P. Yogam in Kerala, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other organisations have played an important role in the removal of untouchability.
Intellectuals like Keshabchandra Sen, Iswara Chandra Vidya Sagar, Justice Ranade, Jyoti Rao Phule, Sri Naraya Guru, Gandhiji, Sri Guruji Golwalkar and others also tried to rouse the conscience of the people against the practice of untouchability. The Harijan Sevak Sangha, Depressed Class Union, the Social Service League, Depressed Class League, the Scheduled Classes Federation, etc., also tried to remove the caste disabilities.

Caste System – Ideas of Basaveshwara

Shri Basaveshwara is among the greatest social reformers, born and lived in Karnataka and tried to bring about a total transformation in the social system of his times. No other social reformer has been able to bring about such tremendous revolutionary changes in the society he lived, as did Shri Basaveshwara.

Life and Events

Shri Basaveshwara was born in the latter half of the 12th century at a place a called Ingaleshwar, in the present Bagewadi taluk of Bijapur district. The place is also known as Basavana Bagewadi, because of his birth in that place.
The parents of Basava, Madarasa and Madalambike were Shaiva Brahmins. Madarasa was 'Puravaradhiswar', i.e., Chietain of five hundred Mahajana families. He was quite rich and Madalambike was a very religious woman.

Born with this background, Shri Basavewhara, according to his family culture, started the study of Agamas, Vedas, Puranas, (all religious scriptures of traditional Hindu religion). But his study was not just cramming. He started reflecting on whatever was taught to him. The divine origin of Vedas, the system of society that Vedas justified and supported, the discriminatory view points, were some of the things about which he started thinking seriously and introspecting. A religion advocating Ahimsa (non-violence), but engaging itself in violence, put him in a dilemma. The people who argued to go according to the religious dictates themselves deviating from the path of religion would anger him. The Dwija's (twice-born) not practising what they preach, could not be tolerated. Just when he was engaged in the thoughts of such nature and was trying to find out solutions, he lost his parents, and he went into the care of Muttabbe.

An important event in the life of Basaveshwara determined the path that he would take throughout his life. When he turned eight, he was to go through the ceremony of receiving the holy-
thread (Janiwara). But considering the holy-thread as a symbol of discrimination between human beings, he tore it off and defied his relatives at Bagewadi and walked towards the east, to the home of his sister Nagamma and brother-in-law Shivaswami, who were at 'Sangama', with the intention of pursuing his own faith and searching new values of life.

He lived and studied at 'Sangama' for twelve years. After that he came to Mangalwad and was acquainted with the Royal family of Chalukyas. Here he pointed certain facts to the treasurer in the budget of the kingdom, which were to the tune of Rs. 5 crores (considering large amount at those times). The treasurer Siddhanandadhipati gave him a job in the treasury on a salary of 100 gold coins per year. After the death of the treasurer within a few days, the king Bijjala appointed Basaveshwara as the treasurer. This angered many senior courtiers and they were already against his anti-traditional and anti-religious views. But without heeding to the ire of such people, Basaveshwara went on carrying out his duties meticulously.

Basaveshwara was an advocate of equality among human beings. He was deeply hurt by the way the Dwijas treated the Shudras and he wanted to beat this system by replacing it within
an equally powerful alternative system and that was by creating a feeling of equality among all castes.

The 'Ketaki' flower was considered inauspicious and was not offered in the 'Pooja' to deities by Brahmans. It was for Shudras to make use of it. But one day, in the Court of Bijjala, when a florist offered 'Ketaki' flowers to courtiers, Basaveshwara offered it to his 'Istalinga' and the Vipras opposed it. But Basaveshwara had a ready answer. He said Lord Shiva would accept anything offered by the Bhaktas. It was followed by the miraculous appearance of the pellets of Ketaki flower on the Shivalingas worshipped by Bhaktas as well as those in the temples. It was this miracle which made him the messenger of God, come to earth to establish the kingdom of equality.

Every evening Basaveshwara would preach his social and religious ideas, sitting in the front of his house. He rejected the old system, its theory as well as rituals. He said that, 'Not only among human beings, but also among animals and all creatures there is no difference'.

Because of these doings, he invited the wrath of the Brahmans in the Court of Bijjala.
An Incident Challenging System

One day while going to the king's court, he heard Shiva Strotras from a house belonging to Nagideva, who was a Holeya (Shudra) but had joined the Shivasamaja established by Basaveshwara. Basaveshwara entered the house of Nagideva, performed Pooja and had food also in Nagideva’s house.

This was reported to Bijjala, when Bijjala asked Basaveshwara about this, he gave a fitting answer. ‘I have not gone to any Holeyas, who do not know Shiva’.

Apparently he was referring to traditional Brahmins. Gradually, Basaveshwara understood the importance of institutional support for propagating any idea. So he built an institution called Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of Shiva Experience).

Basaveshwara knew that to attain the welfare of the entire society, the religious protection, theology and literature are essential.

This institution would help in attaining this goal. Among those who participated in the discussion of Anubhava Mantapa are Channa Basavanna, Siddharama, Machideva, Aydakki Marayya, Molige couples, Chandayya, Choudayya, Ghattivalayya
are the most prominent. This institution had many members who belonged to Shudra community. Discussions held here form the basis of anti-traditionalism and theism, and are collected in the 'Shunya Sampadane' of the 15th century.

Basaveshwara was also opposed to the caste bound occupations. He argued in favour of the occupational freedom to individuals. In fact, his 'Kayaka' Siddhanta (theory) is one of the simplest economic theories, which advises people to earn their livelihood by hard physical work. He says that when one is engaged in 'Kayaka' (work-duty) one can even forget the 'Gurudarshan' and Pooja because 'Kayaka is Kailasa' (Work is Worship).

Thus Basaveshwara tried to deliver the occupations from castes and tried to root out the caste system by permitting 'Linga Deeksha' to the so-called lower caste people and made them 'Lingayats' [the people who wear Shivalinga on their bodies] that is the member of one society without any discrimination.

Considering the times and traditions within which Basaveshwara lived, it was a revolutionary movement that Basaveshwara initiated. The movement spread in spite of limitations of transport and communication of those times, only
because of its strength and humanistic appeal. It has survived the onslaught of time for eight centuries, during which many foreign rulers came, ruled and went back from the Lingayat precincts of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, but could not destabilise the strong edifice of 'Lingayat' dharma.

IV. Role of Ambedkar and Gandhiji in the Removal of Untouchability and Upliftment of Scheduled Castes

Role of Ambedkar

Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a great Indian social thinker, a born fighter, a famous advocate and a humanist. He was born in an 'untouchable' or 'dalit' community called 'Mahar' in Maharashtra, took a leading role in promoting the welfare of the untouchable castes and in elevating their status. Being the highly educated untouchable in India, Ambedkar became the undisputed spokesman of the untouchables. He took many steps to reform the ways of life of the untouchables. He fought against the injustices done to the untouchables by establishing a political party and a couple of organisations for the untouchables. Pandit Nehru rightly described Ahimas the 'symbol of the great revolt against all the oppressive features of Hindu society'.
1. Ambedkar : The Rational Thinker

Ambedkar was the first to make a scientific study of untouchability. Even though Gandhiji had thought of the ways to remove untouchability before the birth of Ambedkar, it was Ambedkar who drew the attention of the Congress organisation and also of the entire nation towards the grave problems of the untouchables and their deplorable conditions. Ambedkar had made a detailed study of the problem of untouchability, its origin, development, etc.

2. Ambedkar and Self-respect Movement

Ambedkar had made it clear that his main aim in the life was to remove the practice of untouchability and to take the so-called 'untouchable community' towards socio-economic equality and justice. Through his social movement he wanted to instill in the minds of the untouchables the ideas of self-dignity, self-confidence and self-respect. Thus his movement is often called 'self-respect movement'. Ambedkar established an institution called 'Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha', which added momentum to this movement.
3. **Ambedkar and Five Principles or 'Pancha-Sutra'**

Ambedkar wanted the untouchables or 'dalits' to follow some principles in life so that they could attain a respectable status by their own efforts as a community. He recommended ‘Pancha Sutras’ for them. (i) Self-improvement : making one's own efforts for one's improvement without expecting much from others, (ii) Self-progress : making self-efforts for achieving progress in life, (iii) Self-dependence : learning to lessen one's dependence on others and attaining finally self-reliance, (iv) Self-respect : maintaining self-dignity and never sacrificing it for any reason, and (v) Self-confidence : developing confidence in oneself, in one's capacities and in one's efforts.

4. **Ambedkar's Call to Reform the Style of Life**

Ambedkar made an appeal to his community to change its style of life to suit the needs of time. He urged them to stop the dragging of dead cattle out of the village. He wanted them to give up eating carrion, alcoholic drinks and begging. He wanted them to become literate and send their children to schools. Finally, he wanted them to dress well and have self-respect for themselves. Thus, one of his chief aims was to bring about a
revolution in the way of life of the untouchables and in their aspirations for themselves and for their children.

5. The Cardinal Principles of the Dalit Movement:

Ambedkar suggested three principles to govern the 'Dalit Movement'. These principles are education, agitation and organisation.

(i) Education is essential for helping the dalits to take out their mask of ignorance, (ii) agitation becomes inevitable to fight against all the exploiters and cheats, and (iii) organisation is necessary to thrash out individual differences to realise community interest and to fight for a common cause collectively.

After the All India Depressed Class Conference in Nagpur in 1942, Ambedkar declared, 'My final word of advice is to educate, agitate, organise and have faith in yourself. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality'.

Personal efforts to put the three principles into practice:
Ambedkar himself worked out to put these three principles into practice. Ambedkar encouraged the education of dalits through the organisations he established namely, 'Bahiskrita Hitakarini Sabha', 'Independent Labour Party' and 'Depressed Classes Education Society'.

Ambedkar organised agitations in the direction of reaching his goals. His own words reveal his faith in agitations. 'The direct action in respect of Chowder tank in Mahad (of Kolaba district, Maharashtra), the Kolaram temple at Nasik and the Guruvinur temple in Malabar have done in few days what million days of preaching by reformers would never have done'. He personally led the temple entry agitation at Nasik. In 1930, just 10 days before Gandhiji's 'Dandi March', Ambedkar launched a big temple entry movement at Nasik before the Kalaram temple in which more than 15,000 volunteers including 500 women, had taken part. The programme of temple entry was more for creating social consciousness than for asserting religious rights.

Ambedkar realised the importance of 'Organisation' and worked to build few of them. Examples: 'Bahiskrita Hitakarini Sabha' (1924), Mahad Conference or Dasgoon Dalit Conference (1927), 'Independent Labour Party'. As early as in 1920 he had made attempts to organise all the untouchable castes and bring them under one banner. He had organised the first All India Conference of Untouchables in May 1920 at Nagpur.
6. **Call to Destroy the Caste System**

Ambedkar in his efforts to raise the status of untouchables considered the caste system one of the great obstacles. He even gave a call to destroy the caste system in his famous book called, 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936). He wrote in 'Harijan' in 1933, 'The outcaste is a byproduct of the caste system. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of caste system'. As an expression of his disillusionment with Hinduism, he rejected Hinduism and embraced Buddhism with his followers in 1956. (He, however, died in the same year, that is on 6th December 1956.)

7. **Political Role of Ambedkar**

Ambedkar made use of political instruments to achieve the purpose of protecting dalit interests.

**Demand for Separate Electorate for Dalits**

In the First Round Table Conference convened in London in November 1930, Ambedkar who attended it on behalf of the depressed classes spoke about the loathsome condition of the untouchability in India. He prepared a declaration of the fundamental rights of the depressed classes and submitted it to
the Minorities Sub-committee. He demanded the abolition of untouchability and the establishment of equal citizenship. He vehemently demanded a separate electorate for the depressed classes. Gandhiji who boycotted the First Conference and participated in the Second Round Table Conference at London along with Ambedkar, opposed the proposal. He said, 'the political separation of the untouchables and the Hindus would be suicidal to the nation'. He even said that he would resist such a proposal with all his strength. He declared his resolution of 'fast- unto-death'. The conflict between the two leaders was, however, settled by the famous 'Poona Pact' (1932). Ambedkar was able to get some reasonable representation for the untouchables.

Ambedkar who met Gandhiji in 1931 insisted on making the removal of untouchability a pre-condition for a person to become a member of the Congress. He supported the Anti-untouchability League which launched a campaign all over the country to secure for the depressed classes enjoyment of their civil rights such as taking water from the village wells, admission of the children in village schools, etc.
8. **Ambedkar as the ‘Abhinava Manu’**

Ambedkar was invited by the Prime Minister Nehru to be the Law Minister in the First Cabinet of Independent India. Ambedkar accepted the offer. He was made the Chairman of the Drafting Committee to draft the Indian Constitution. Article 17 of the Constitution abolished untouchability. Ambedkar had once declared that he would mourn ‘Manu Smriti’ for its failure to provide justice to the dalits. The same Ambedkar now could get the opportunity and the honour of giving to the people of India their Constitution. He is rightly called ‘Abhinava Manu’ (or Modern Manu). He was awarded ‘Bharata Ratna’ title posthumously. Ambedkar’s ideas, views and thoughts continue to influence and inspire a number of his followers who are spread over the entire nation.

**Role of Mahatma Gandhi**

**His Efforts to Eradicate Untouchability**

Mahatma Gandhiji played a memorable role in uplifting the untouchables. Gandhiji popularised the word ‘Harijan’ meaning ‘the people of God’ a word which was first coined and used by a Brahmin saint, Narasi Mehta. According to Gandhiji, the practice of untouchability is ‘a leper wound in the whole body of Hindu
politic’. He even regarded it as most hateful expression of caste’. He made it his life’s mission to wipe out untouchability and to uplift the depressed and the downtrodden people. As a servant of mankind, he preached that all human beings are equal and the Harijans too have a right for social life along with other caste groups.

**Gandhiji’s Appeal to the Conscience of the People**

Gandhiji, who regarded untouchability as a blot on Hinduism, wanted to do away with it completely. He wrote in 1920, ‘... Without the removal of the taint (of untouchability) ‘swaraj’ is meaningless term’. He even felt that the foreign domination of our country was the result of our exploitation of almost one-sixth of our own people in the name of religion.

Gandhiji decided to stage a campaign against untouchability and was unprepared to make any compromise with it. He advocated positive means for the uplift of Harijans. He addressed various public meetings reposing doctrines of Harijan welfare. He led several processions of Harijans with other upper caste people and made them participate in ‘Poojas, bhajans, keerthans and puranas’. He believed that opportunities of education and temple entry would reduce social inequalities
between Harijans and caste Hindus. He launched movements for cleaning Harijan residential areas, for digging wells for them and for similar other beneficial things.

Gandhiji served the 'Harijan Sevak Sangha' started by the social reformer Takkar Bapa in the year 1932 for the religious and social welfare of the Harijans. This organisation opened schools and dispensaries in various places and arranged for free educational facilities and scholarships for Harijan children.

Political Role of Gandhiji

As a respected political leader of the masses, Gandhiji could never ignore the tasks of the removal of untouchability and upliftment of Harijans. Gandhiji entered the Indian freedom struggle in 1919. From 1920 onwards, under the leadership of Gandhiji the Indian National Congress became committed to get the independence on the one hand and to the removal of untouchability on the other. In 1920 itself, he declared that 'Untouchability cannot be given a secondary place in the programme' of Congress.
Gandhiji and Separate Electorate for Harijans

Gandhiji was very much against the British policy of 'divide and rule'. He condemned the British policy of separating the Harijans from the rest of the Hindus. Hence, he protested against the proposal of creating separate electorate for the Harijans. He said to Ambedkar, who was in favour of the proposal that, 'the political separation of the untouchables from the Hindus would be suicidal to the nation'.

Gandhiji declared at the Minorities Committee of the Second Round Table Conference in London (9132) that, 'we do not want the untouchables to be classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain such in perpetuity, so many Muslims and Christians. Will the untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? I would rather feel that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. I will resist it with my life'.

Impact of Gandhiji's 'Fast-Unto-Death Satyagraha'

In spite of Gandhiji's protest, the British Prime Minister decided to grant separate seats for the depressed classes and the right of double vote in which they could elect their own representatives and also vote in general elections. In protest against this 'communal award' Gandhiji decided to stage the fast
unto death Satyagraha. This declaration of Gandhiji opened the eyes of whole country towards the problem of untouchables.

In 1932 the Harijan Sevak Sangha was formed and its conference at Bombay pledged that the right to use the public roads and wells would be given statutory recognition when the Swaraj Parliament met. This pledge was stressed by Gandhiji in 1932 when he said, ‘There could be no rest... until untouchability becomes thing of the past.’ The Harijan movement gained strength throughout the country. Gandhiji went on an all-India tour to collect huge sums of money for this programme.

**Gandhiji commits Congress for the Removal of Untouchability**

At the behest of Gandhiji and the Congress, all the Congress candidates who contested elections in 1937 had pledged themselves to the removal of untouchability. As early as in 1931 itself, at the Karachi Session of the Congress, at the behest of Gandhiji, a resolution was adopted. It declared, ‘All the citizens are equal before the law irrespective of caste, creed or sex’. In 1938 the Removal of the Civil Disabilities Act was passed by the Madras Legislature which provided that no Harijan shall be disabled from any social or public amenity. In the same year, it also opassed the Malabar Temple Entry Act which threw open the
temples in Malabar. In 1939, the temple of Madurai was opened to the Harijans. Thus Gandhiji’s fast and his Harijan movement released tremendous forces throughout the country, which led to the removal of some of the disabilities of the Harijans.

**Gandhiji’s and His Harijan Welfare Activities**

Gandhiji was not just a preacher. He practised what he preached. He could win the hearts of millions of Harijans because of his sincere approach to solve their problems. Gandhiji lived with the Harijans and shared their distress by inculcating in them the ideas of better social adjustment with the rest of the Indian community. He advocated equal opportunities of education and intermingling of Harijan students with those of the upper castes. He fought for various legal protections against several kinds of injustice done to them. He adopted a Harijan child and set an example for others to emulate. As a result of his sincere efforts and strong recommendations, untouchability was declared illegal under the Indian Constitution. At his behest an opportunity was given to Ambedkar, leader of the depressed classes, to join the Central Cabinet and to be the chief architect of the Indian Constitution.
Gandhiji's Proposals for Harijan Welfare

1. Those who claim themselves to be the servants of Harijan must serve the Harijans with all the dedication.

2. Awareness must be created among the Harijans regarding cleanliness, sanitation and health.

3. The practice of carrying human waste on head must be stopped.

4. They should be persuaded to drop their habit of eating carrion and dead animals.

5. Practice of untouchability must be immediately stopped by all.

6. Harijans must be provided with clean drinking water facility.

7. Good houses, at low cost but with enough provision for lighting and ventilation, must be built for Harijans.

8. Harijan children must be made to go to school and even adult education programme should be introduced for Harijan illiterates.

9. Harijans must be persuaded to drop their habit of drinking alcohol.

10. Harijans must be allowed to enter all the public places including temples and to draw water from the wells.
11. There should be no bar for the entry of Harijans to temples.

'Harijans Day' should be observed by all at least one day in a year. Ambedkar and Gandhiji who fought against the problem of untouchability and served to promote the welfare of 'untouchables' are not alive today. Their followers, however, continuing their work. Untouchability has not yet become 'the thing of the past'. The removal of untouchability requires a basic transformation in the general attitude towards it. Gandhiji was right when he wrote in his letter to Thakkar Bapa, 'The salvation of the depressed class will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus.' The country is awaiting such a revolution.

Though Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi were committed to the cause of the Scheduled Castes and to the programme of eradication of untouchability, one cannot ignore the differences in their viewpoints regarding the manner in which and the means by which these goals were to be achieved. The difference is pointed not to weigh the greatness of one against the other. It is only to know how two great leaders of India differed in their approach to a situation, which was regarded as a serious problem by both.
1) Ambedkar was basically a radical and revolutionary thinker. His approach to the means of achieving the goal of eradication of untouchability was so shaped due to the bitter experiences of his childhood days, which had a profound influence on his personality and thinking.

2) As a leader of freedom movement Mahatma Gandhi’s prime concern was the liberation of the Indian nation from the tyranny of the British. He did not want the Harijans to be isolated from caste Hindus as a result of the proposal of separate constituencies for Harijans and double voting facilities. Gandhiji knew that British had an ulterior motive of dividing the country into caste Hindus and Harijans. He opposed the move and succeeded.

Gandhi was a humanist and unlike Ambedkar was a pacifist. Gandhiji was opposed to violence of any kind, but Ambedkar was prepared for a fight for what he thought to be right. But one finds that this kind of militancy was not present in the personality of the Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhiji wanted that Dalits should attain a social status equal to that of caste Hindus and become the respected citizen of India like others.
In the recorded speeches of Mahatma Gandhi titled, 'Plain Talk to Women' it is clearly stated that God has not created men with the badge of superiority or inferiority. No work or conduct can render a man or woman untouchable for all time. As species can be distinguished by their physical features, there is no distinguishing feature that separates the untouchables from the remaining mankind. Then why this untouchability?

He advises us to go to the Harijans and embrace them as our own kith and kin to expiate ourselves from the sin of untouchability. He suggests the privileged to ensure availability of food, clean drinking water, light, air and shelter to the Harijans. He states, 'The last thing is to contribute one's mite to the Harijan fund which has no other end but amelioration of the lot of Harijans'.

**Gandhi and Ambedkar**

Both Gandhiji and Ambedkar did succeed in their attempts to lessen the problems of untouchability. Ambedkar believed that if economic and political conditions of the untouchables were improved, they could come up well. Gandhi never undermined the importance of economic and political aspects but at the same time added one more dimension, namely, religion. It is religion
that brings a sense of dharma – a moral code – which guides us in our economic, political and social fields. Religion includes a sense of fairness and justice in every individual and consequently in society. It is religion that gives one the inner strength. And without this inner strength, economic, political and social support is no support and if one feels for a while that he is secure, without inner support he will feel insecure. This is one of the reasons why Gandhi insisted that religious conditions should also be given its proper place in the upliftment of Harijans.
References


2. Ibid.


4. Ibid., p. 306.

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7. Ibid.

