

Caste & Varna and Their Impact On Society and Women : Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Perspective



Sociology

KEYWORDS :

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Dr. Ambedkar's views on Varna and caste.

The origin of Varna vyavasta is a peculiar process in Indian history. It was against the Naturalism and Theology. The varnas were happened or created based on the individual birth, who born the God physical structure. As far as Theology is concerned God is Omnipotent, Omnipresence, Omniscient. God is the creator of Universe. The human life is the gift of God. By the grace of God human beings occupy the highest place in the Nature. God has Maha Karuna, Love, compassion and forgiveness. God is universal and universal humanhood. No question of discrimination in the God's Nature. All human beings have been treated as equal in the view of God. If any God shows discrimination against individuals, it is against the Theology.

According to Purushasuktha hymn of Rigveda there is a verse which says that of the primeval man 'the Brahmin was the Mouth, the Kshatriya was as the Arms, his Thighs were the vaishyas and from his two feet the Shudra was born. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudhra – these are described as Varna and not Jatis. On a simple rendering of this Rigvedic hymn shows that the social organisation as a whole was made out of a combination of Varnas having four specific qualities and being associated with different types of action. The difference among the varnas are due to difference in the proportions of the three qualities or gunas of 'sattva' purity 'raja's' (valour) and 'tamas' (darkness).

The purushasuktha was made in chaturvarnya a "sacred institution" "a devine ordination". Manu advocated the purushasuktha as a part of divine injunction. Manu said, for the prosperity of the world, he (creator) from in Mouth, Arms, Things and Feet created the four varnas. According to him 'veda is the only and ultimate sanction for Dharma'.¹

According to Dr. Ambedkar the portion of Vedas, at any rate, particularly the purushasuktha was fabricated by Brahmins, intended to serve their own purpose. According to Ambedkar, it was Manu who invested the social ideal of chaturvarnya as contained in purushasuktha with a degree of divinity and infallibility, which it did not have earlier.

Dr. Ambedkar criticized the chaturvarnya society. He said there was no social equality among four classes. They must be bound together by the rule of graded inequality. The four classes should observe a division of occupation. There is no freedom in choosing occupation. The right of education was give to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The Sudras and women had no right to education. Women were treated as Sudras and untouchables in all four classes. Their right to education, right to freedom and equality has been seized in purushasuktha.

Naturally education is a gateway of all human rights. If education is denied to woman automatically the other rights will be seized in the woman's life. Because of this reason 50 per cent of Indian women could not get the equal status on par with men. This is one of the historical mistakes in Indian society.

Dr. Ambedkar writes, "the principle underlying the purushasuktha is, therefore, criminal intent and anti-social in its results. Its aim is to perpetuate in illegal gain obtained by an unjust wrong reflected on another".² According to him the Hindu Society has denied social justice to a large number of people in general and women in particular in the name of divine order and varna vyavasta.

Dr. Ambedkar said that the social order prescribed by purushasuktha had never been questioned by anyone except Buddha. He also said that Arya samajists had done a great mischief in making the Hindu Society a stationary society by preaching that the Vedas were eternal without beginning, without end and infallible.

Therefore Dr. Ambedkar criticized the ideal of chaturvarna enunciated by the Purushasuktha on the grounds that

- It preached a class-composed society as its ideal.
- It converted the de-facto state of affairs into a de-jure connotation of an ideal society.
- It gave the de-facto state of class composition a legal effect by a accepting it a de-jure connotation of an ideal society.
- It accepted the class composition as an ideal and also sacred and divine.
- It made the four classes a matter of dogma.
- It accepted the graded inequality among the four classes and man and woman.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, the attempt of purushasuktha to realize the ideal was a kind of political jugglery, the like of which was not to be found in any book of religion.³ Almost all the Hindu books are replete with the concept of dharma. Both Manu and Yjnvalkya, a learned Hindu seer, refer to dharma as compulsory duties and obligation of the different varnas. The concept of dharma as has been included in the varnashrama dharma has brought ruination to the concept of social solidarity.

Dr. Ambedkar sought revolutionary changes in Hindu society. He rejected the theory of chaturvarna prescribed by the purushasuktha of the Rigveda and believed that originally there were only three varnas. He stated that purushasuktha was a later production interpolated into the Rigveda. Dr. Ambedkar rejects the social ideal of chaturvarnya, which given an official graduation, fixation and permanency to each varna of the principle of graded inequality in society. Varna system is prescribed by the purushasuktha of the Rigveda. It is predominantly in Indian society and Brahmins are only eligible to learn hymns, but women are excluded in four varnas.

In May 1916, Dr. Ambedkar read a paper on "The Caste in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" at the anthropology seminar sponsored by Dr. Goldenweiser. It was published in the Indian Antiquary in May 1917. He observed that endogamy was the essence of castes. According to him, a caste was an enclosed class. He was of the view that Chaturvarnya provided the base for the caste – system which has ruined the Hindus.⁴

The caste system created a society which had untouchables, unapproachable and unshadowables. Moreover Hindu society had in its fold various criminal tribes as well as several primitive tribes. In addition to the four class (various) of chaturvarna, Ambedkar recognized fifth classes (panchama varna, under the Hindu social fold, which was outside chaturvarna. It included the following –

- Criminal tribes
- Aborigines
- Untouchables⁵

All were living in deplorable conditions. Therefore, Ambedkar vehemently criticized the Hindu civilization and called it an infamy. Dr. Ambedkar said, "I cannot reconcile myself to this ideal, only new names one given, but the social content is the

same". He added, "to allow this chaturvarna based on worth to be designated as by such stinking labels of Brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra indicative of social divisions based on birth is a snave".⁶

Dr. Ambedkar said that the untouchables were originally Broken Men. He thought that the untouchables also shunned the Brahmanas. He explained one hypothesis that the Broken Men were Buddhists. The broken men did not care to return to Brahmanism, when they embraced Buddhism, shunned the Brahmanas: consequently, the Brahmanas imposed untouchability upon the broken men.

Dr. Ambedkar explained, how chaturvarna was going to spoil the right of masses. The weak in Europe has had in his freedom of military service his physical weapon, in suffer age his political weapon and in education his moral weapon. All the three weapons were denied to the masses in India by chaturvarna.

According to Ambedkar, varna and caste were evil ideas and it mattered very little whether one believed in varna or caste. Varna was infallible like the Vedas. The Bhagavada Gita has done enough mischief by giving a fresh lease of life to the varna – system. He said further, "with Mr. Gandhi varna is determined by birth and profession of a varna is determined by principle of heredity so that varna is merely another name of caste".

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar vehemently condemned the social order which is based on varna or caste. The learned doctor said, "My ideal could be a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity".⁷ A measure of liberty is necessary to maintain a free democratic social order. He speaks in the sense of right to free movement, in the sense of right to life and limb. He argues to an individual's freedom to choose one's own profession.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, "equality may be a fiction, but nonetheless one must accept it as the governing principles". The principle of equality ought to form the basis of an ideal society. Dr. Ambedkar's ideal of fraternity is in short; there must be social endosmosis, which is only another name for democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar criticized Gandhi's theory of chaturvarna as impracticable in this age and there was no hope of revival in the future. Further he said that Mahatma Gandhi was doing a great disservice to social reform by advocating his imaginary utility of division of varnas, for it created hindrances in our way.⁸ He said "To me this chaturvarna with its old labels is utterly repellent and my whole being rebels against it. He emphasized that men must be free from the deep rooted religious prejudices or sacred notions behind castes, Divinity behind the castes i.e behind the shastras should be destroyed.

Social change is a myth in chaturvarna system. It never helps to individual and social development. That's why Dr. Ambedkar proposed social change is possible through legislation. In this connection he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in 1950, the chief aim was to reform and to bring radical and fundamental changes in Hindu society through legislative means. Based on, he suggested the spread of mass education. It is important to examine Ambedkar's view on man, woman and society, in the caste component of Hindu Society.

Dr. Ambedkar argued that the Hindu social order is opposed to equality of people. It treats inequality as its official doctrine totally ignores the principle of fraternity. There is no liberty in it. There is no importance to the individual in the Hindu Social order. The hierarchical order of the classes or castes is rigid. The relative changes in the position of the individual are totally ignored.

Hinduism believes that its social order is divine. It is called the Varna vyavastha. Its every varna woman was treated as secondary and suppressed class. Even in kshatriya varna the so called Rama showed his disregard for Sita by suspecting her chastity and conduct in her captivity by Ravana. It indicates immodest of man's personality and its generated impairment against women in Hindu society.

As regards castes, he says,

- Caste divides labourers.
- Caste disassociates work from interest.
- Caste disconnects intelligence from manual labour.
- Caste devitalize by denying to him the right to cultivate vital interest.
- Caste prevents mobilization.

Caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Dr. Ambedkar explained "The caste system prevents common activity and by preventing it, it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. There is only individual share or part in the associate activity".⁹

Dr. Ambedkar added "So long as caste remain, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion and Shuddhi (purificatory conversion) will be both a folly and futility" He commented "Caste has made sanghatan and co-operation even for a good cause impossible".

Dr. Ambedkar has concluded the following possible results of the reorganization of society based on chaturvarna and caste.

- The caste has ruined the Hindus
- The reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of chaturvarna is impossible because the varnavyavastha is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose.
- It is harmful because the effect of the varnavyavastha is to degrade the masses by denying the opportunity to acquire knowledge and emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted that the Hindu society must be reorganized on religious basis, which would recognize the principle of liberty, equality and fraternity. In order to achieve this object, he suggested following remedial measures.

- The sense of religious sanctity behind caste and varna should be destroyed.
- The sanctity of caste and varna can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of shastras.¹⁰

Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his book who were the shudras? to the memory of Jyotiba Phule. The dedication runs "Inscribed to the memory of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, 1827-1890. The greatest shudra of modern India, who preached the gospel that for India Social Democracy, was more vital than the independence from foreign one.

Varna vyavastha, caste system and untouchability are the major evils of Hindu social order. The untouchable is called 'Avarna', i.e. out side the Varnas. The Caste System of graded inequality is still prevailing in Indian society. No person of Indian origin, born on Indian soil can escape the influence of caste. The caste system is part and parcel of Hindu religion and Hindu society. The Caste system creates discrimination among people at large and Woman in particular, and its violation of human rights including woman rights. The caste discrimination affects nearly 800 millions of Dalit Bahujans day in and day out of their social, cultural, educational and economic life. It shows 400 millions of Dalit Bahujans women are adversely affected by the caste discrimination. Woman Liberty, Equality, Justice and fraternity ideals are crux in the caste discrimination. No one could come out from these dreadful situations in general, women in particular.

The untouchables in the order of 'divine creation' of the Brahmanas. In Vedic times there was no untouchability. However, it prevailed in Indian society. These people were far away from all privileges of social, educational, spiritual and economical, particularly woman from these group were lost their rights. Some times within the family in all Varnas Woman treats as untouchable, when she is in menstruation and should not participate in day to day activities.

The Varna and caste system indicates the status of woman in

Hindu society. Women are considered as suppressed and depressed class even within Varna and Caste in Hindu society.

Observations and suggestions

- The caste has ruined and suffered the people.
- The caste has created barricades among citizens
- The caste will spoil the national integration and development
- The caste will crux the idea of oneness
- The Hindu social order is vertical without equality.
- B.R. Ambedkar wishes to organize the Hindu social order

as horizontal with equality, liberty, justice and fraternity. These four fold truths should be provided to all.

- Woman has not been treated as human being in Hindu society
- Women were discriminated in society and family in all spheres of life.
- Varna and caste should be rooted out in Indian society by enacting law through parliament.
- Indian citizens' mindset should be changed. It is the root cause of all evils.

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