



Practice of Untouchability in Indian Society: New Perspective and Methodology

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ABSTRACT

This research paper concentrates on the practice of untouchability. The caste system has turned untouchables into virtual slaves and they are suffering from discrimination. Untouchables are also deprived of their rights and dignity because of dominance of upper castes who did not consider untouchables as part of human society because the discrimination is endorsed by ancient Hindu texts. In this regard I would like to discuss whether Hindu religious texts have really led to this practice of untouchability? How do untouchables identify themselves in society? Is there any similarity between the classical accounts of Hindu religious texts and actual fact? Is the caste system the main cause for the practice of untouchability? So I would like to focus on the above issues and the problems that are faced by untouchables in a different way so as to enable us to look at the real problems of untouchables employing a new perspective and methodology.

KEYWORDS

Untouchability, Fact of Untouchability

Introduction:

Untouchability is generally practice in the society that, one in every seven is considered as untouchable and he/she is systematically kept par away from the society. Untouchability foremost be an indivisible and important part of the Indian Caste system. It is estimated that the practice of untouchability has a history of more than Two thousand five years of history. Practice of untouchability followed in India is far worse than the slavery system and is a major obstacle for the developing country. Untouchability system is also a shameful custom followed in India. Until and unless untouchability system is eradicated from the society, equality in the society can be least expected. Many thinkers and researchers (*Dirks, Dumont, Tharot, Limbale, Paanini, TriptiBallava, Ambedkar, Javarayya*, et.,al) opined that untouchability is a blame of Hindu society, they also opined that Hindu religious epics gave birth to untouchability system, and they emphasized, nurtured, and observed this system.

The subject matter of the present article comprises of two divisions. *The first part* emphasizes on the Research and Study carried out on Indian Society by few Western and Indian thinkers, their explanations, this part also deals with various aspects like meaning of untouchability, the origin of untouchability custom and identification of untouchability customs. In *the second part*, under a modern study framework the recent research and studies are compared with those of the explanations made in the first part, their limitations are sought. This part also throws light on the issues like principle and theoretical problems. Likewise *the third part* is a conclusion. This part prescribes and suggests remedial methods to understand the complex of untouchability phenomenon followed in Indian society.

PART 1

The natures of the untouchable communities those are secured lower rank in the social structure of Indian society when compared to those with other communities around the world are leading a miserable life. The Indian community has discriminated untouchables as *Panchama Varna* (Out Caste) under them most of the deprived and lower caste communities are considered as untouchables and this one inhuman and shameful culture. This has led them to miserable position and is a very evil practice. This distorted caste system has made the deprived and poor communities and untouchable communities. Many thinkers and philosophers opined that there existed always conflict between Brahmins, who had a highest position in the caste system and other backward com-

munities, which worsened the societal conditions more than the slavery system. All these aspect in turn gave rise to the evil custom called as untouchability.

Part 2

The explanations provided in the above part have various limitations. It is believed that these are the limitations which are the real obstacles today in curbing the problem of untouchability. The study relating to the Indian society has impact of the westernized culture these can be only said these explanations are the perceptions of the westerners about the Indian society they cannot be considered as true picture of Indian society. *Prof. Balagangadhar* who is trying to study the Indian society in a new theoretical framework opines that though there are several castes in Indian society but it is wrong concept to study that all the castes of the Indian society as the part of Indian caste system because the explanations about the castes and caste system incorporated Indian social structure are only based on westerners interpretation. (Rather influenced with western culture and not on Indian social structure). The caste system can only be viewed theoretical background. The various practical/pragmatic aspects and its association have to be studied.

Prof Balagangadhar opines that the explanations of the concept of Indian Caste system is only the experience of the European culture, it does not depict the picture practically Indian social system. But unfortunately most of the western and Indian thinkers reiterate that these opinions of the westerners are true and practical.

Dr. Shanmukha opines that most of the literary works relating to deprived communities depicts the practice of untouchability and their miserably conditions all are the due to the Indian caste system and social structure of the caste discrimination in the Indian system and unfortunately these explanations are neglected in the routine life of the untouchables. He in his research literature relating to deprived community has denied that the caste system in the Hindu religion is not the sole reason for the origin of untouchability practice. Further, he also depicts that Manudharmashastra, Upanishads, Vedas, Literatures, Purushasukta etc., and also any other literary works relating to Hindu religion does not provide the directive instructions about the status of the untouchables. Likewise, there are no evidences and explanations directing how the lifestyle of the untouchables should be? in any of the Hindu Religious books (followed by Westerners). Therefore, we don't find caste system construction as per the directions of

the Hindu Religious works in the Indian society. Therefore it is believed that the practice of untouchability, their exploitation, have importantly existed as a practice, custom, routine habits since per historic period. But it throw light that the Hindu Religious Myths (As followed by Westerners) are providing direction for the development of the untouchability practice in India. He also opines that the concept of Bhagwadgheeta, Manudharmashastra, Purushasukta, and other Hindu religious myths explaining the status of untouchables is practically beyond the reach of almost rural people where we find the practice of untouchability at the maximum extent today. Therefore, identifying and finding out the solutions focusing on untouchability practice, the reasons for their miserable life are not adequate in the so called caste system of Indian Social system (Constructed by the westerners). He opines that the efforts should be made keeping in view practical aspects, like their common customs and on the basis of which their actual social culture should be understood and accordingly new suitable efforts should be made to curb this evil custom from the Indian social system.

Part III

Recently, *Prof. Balagangadhar* have carried-out the research on Indian society and depicted the social construction, culture of the Indian society are not based on the explanations given by westerners. It is rather more practical. The explanations of the westerners with respect to Indian society is rather theoretical and conceptual than practical, they have emphasized experience of the western culture. On the basis of western society and caste system (constructed by westerners) it is not adequate and relevant to understand the untouchability practice, the problems of the deprived in India. It would not be appropriate to find out the solutions for the problems of the deprived in India. It is quite relevant and necessary to carryout study with the new dimension which is rather more practical and applicable to Indian society. Apparently it is not appropriate or relevant to say that the caste system in Hindu society is the prime reason for the practice of untouchability in India.

It is revealed from the recent researches on the Indian Society that it the social construction of India has the impact of Social construction of the Europeans. In British society there existed three categories amongst the communities namely Priest, King and handicraft or former community. It is believed that such community categorization concept is observed in all the communities and research of Indian society on this basis resembles the medieval social structure of the Europeans. The stereotypes (Caste model) of caste system existed in India was helpful in understating the social structure during the study. But apparently in the Indian caste system we don't find caste system of the western countries. Therefore, the practice of untouchability system is not directed by the westerner's opinion about the Indian social system (Prof. Balagangadhar). But how do we know the fact of practice of untouchability in Indian Social system? What are the practical aspects which come into account in the practice of untouchability in India? With what many aspects is the fact of untouchability linked with. The study has to be focused on answering the above questions and likewise it has to design its research.

Fact of Untouchability and Research Methods

Most importantly it is necessary to understand the concept of Social Structure of Indian society and in this background it is essential to know the practice of untouchability and the status of the untouchables in India. The practical fact of practice of untouchability can be understood by following research methods:

Firstly, it is important to know whether orthodox caste system followed in India has any explanations about the practice of untouchability or has any descriptions of the status of the untouchables. This can be achieved by carrying extensively field-work. Secondly, it is important to review the Hindu Religious books and various conceptual and practical explanations because it was considered that Hindu religion is the cause for the practice of untouchability by the westerners. Apart from

the caste system background constructed by the westerners, it is also important to understand the identification of untouchables in the society, and it has to be analyzed. If the fore coming studies focus on these practical reasons and facts perhaps, the directive aspects for the untouchability practice can be identified easily.

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