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Condition Untouchables and Liberation Movement

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Abstract:

Dalit " is „oppressed or broken“ British Government for the first time to refer to the untouchables, when it issued the "Government of India (Scheduled Caste) order 1936."3 Scheduled Castes. untouchables were the degraded, demoralized and dehumanized people. The shackles of the religion and Shastras started breaking due to the force of these intellectual and reformative movements. Jyotiba Phule whose awakening, inspiration and motivation gave rise to Dalit movement organised by the Dalit themselves.

Keywords; dehumanized, condemned, thralldom, illegitimate, shabby, insanitary, perverted

The meaning of the term "Dalit" is "oppressed or broken". This word "Dalit", is specifically used to refer to the socially, culturally, educationally, economically oppressed and degraded class of people, the ex-untouchables. The untouchables have been called by different names such as, Harijans, "Exterior castes, Depressed Classes, Outcastes, Pariahs. In ancient times the terms such as Mlechha, Chandala, Panchama, Avarna, Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Atishudra etc. were used for the untouchables.²

During the British Rule the untouchables were generally termed as the "Depressed Classes. However, in April 1935 the term "Scheduled Castes" was used by the British Government for the first time to refer to the untouchables, when it issued the „Government of India (Scheduled Caste) order 1936."3 Scheduled Castes (SC) is the constitutional nomenclature used in Indian Constitution and other Acts or legal documents to refer to the Untouchables or the ex-untouchables. The term "Dalit" was a Hindi and Marathi translation of „the term 'Depressed Classes' used for the first time in journalistic writings in 1930s. In 1930, there was a Depressed Classes newspaper, published in Pune, named as "Dalit Bandhu" (Friend of Dalits),⁴ which can be referred to as the first appearance of the word "Dalit".⁵

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar also in his Marathi speeches used this word for the Untouchables. He also used the term "broken men" which is the English translation of word "Dalit", to refer to the ancestors of the Untouchables, in his classic book "The Untouchables" published in 1948.⁶ Thus, the term "Dalit" has been both generally and specifically used to refer to the ex-untouchables except in most Marxist historical writings and in subaltern studies that subsume Dalit within a class of peasants, agricultural labour, factory workers, students and the like.⁷ Similarly, the Dalit Panther, a militant organisation of Dalits in Maharashtra, in its manifesto of 1973, also, included in the term Dalit " the Scheduled Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and those who were being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion."⁸ Despite these exceptional and extended uses of the word Dalit, it basically and generally refers to the ex-untouchables. In this thesis also it is used to refer specifically to the untouchables, the Scheduled Castes or the Depressed Classes.

In the Indian Hindu social order the untouchables were the degraded, demoralized and dehumanized people. They were condemned to the lowest stratum of the Hindu society for ages. They were socially, religiously, culturally, economically, politically, educationally and morally oppressed and suppressed. They're very being as a human was robbed of. They were condemned to the subhuman level. They were treated worse than beasts. Their condition was worse than the slaves in the western countries. Their touch and even shadow was considered as pollutant. They had been thrown into the thralldom of perpetual servitude, oppression and misery. They were born untouchables; they lived as untouchables and died as untouchables. Boycotted and neglected, they had no existence of their own.⁹ The Untouchability was a very peculiar characteristic of the Indian society, and which was the worst and perverted outcome of the Caste System.¹⁰ The system or practice of untouchability was an unnatural and illegitimate product of the Caste System. Therefore, to know the origin of the Untouchability one must get to know the origin of the Caste System.

Socio-Religious and Economic Conditions of the Untouchables

The Untouchability was the perverted outcome of the Caste System; and the Caste System was functioning in full swing in the Hindu village. Each and every behavior of the Untouchables was supervised and regulated by the caste Hindu, i.e. the orthodox upper-caste Hindus. They did this duty of theirs in the name of Shastras. In fact, it was the Shastras which had authorized them to such policing. In every village there was a code which the untouchables were required to follow. The touchable Hindus kept watch on the observance of this code.

The Untouchables had been living on the outskirts of the villages. Their arrival in and departure from the Hindu village had been strictly monitored for ages. They had to live in their separate quarters away from the locality of the Hindus. They could not break this rule of segregation. They were forced to live in shabby, insanitary shanties or cottages. They were not allowed to live in a well-built house. They were not allowed to wear clean dress, shoes, and gold ornaments etc. They could not bear high-sounding names. They must conform to their status as inferior and wear marks of inferiority.

While giving the realistic picture of the plight of the untouchables Dr. Ambedkar very rightly described it as follow:

The advent of British Rule brought a dawn of new era in India. The British also brought with them English education, western thoughts, ideas and culture which triggered an intellectual outburst leading to socio-religious reformation movements in India. On the backdrop of these movements there was also the rise of Dalit movement.

The shackles of the religion and Shastras started breaking due to the force of these intellectual and reformative movements. The age long socio-religious orthodoxy, the Caste System, superiority of Brahmins, and other evil social practices like sati, child marriage, forced widowhood, tonsuring, bonded labour, prohibition on the education of the general masses of the society etc. were challenged vehemently.

Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of this social reformation movements in India.⁷³ However, in the case of Maharashtra it was Acharya Balshastri Jambhlikar (A.D. 1810-1846), who was the father of Marathi newspaper and the first social reformer in Maharashtra.⁷⁴ Dr. Bhau Daji Lad (A.D. 1824-1874), Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias Lokhitwadi (A.D. 1823-1892), Vishnushastri Pandit (A.D. 1827-76), Dadoji Pandurang Tarkhadkar (A.D. 1814-1882), Jagannath Alias Nanashankar Shet (A.D. 1803-1865), Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (A.D. 1827-1890), Rajashree Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade (A.D. 1842-1901), Pracharya Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (A.D. 1856-1895), Karmvir Vitthal Ramaji Shinde (A.D. 1873-1944), Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve (A.D. 1858-1962),

Bhaskarrao Jadhav, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh were the non-Dalit, leading and notable social reformers of Maharashtra.

These social reformers, excluding Mahatma Phooley and Vitthal Ramaji Shinde and including the pioneers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and others confined their reforms to awareness and abolition of evil social practices such as Sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, forced widowhood, tonsuring, and that to was restricted to their own caste i.e. Brahmin or so. Some of them worked for the education of 42 women. However, none of them worked for the eradication of Caste System, untouchability and uplift of the untouchables, though they knew these social evils very well. They did have sympathy for the untouchables and they expressed that at one time or other.⁷⁵ For example Lokhitwadi said, "Brahmins Mahar, do not touch them but sits beside the English. I am surprised to see this. According to the scriptures Mahars are closer to us than the English."⁷⁶ Vishnubuva Pandit expressed his sympathy as "The partiality of keeping Mahar outside the door and allowing Brahman inside should be avoided."⁷⁷

The Pioneer who vehemently attacked the Caste System, social, inequality, Brahmanism and who worked for the uplift of the untouchables and lower classes and of women and their education was Mahatma Jyotiba Phooley. He along with awakening them worked practically for their uplift. He was the first reformer to open the school for both girls as well as the untouchables, in 1948 and 1954 respectively.⁷⁸ It was Jyotiba Phooley whose awakening, inspiration and motivation gave rise to Dalit movement organised by the Dalit themselves. He was the.

Thus, the pioneer work and influence of Mahatma Phooley, the English education and the movements initiated by the untouchable leaders like Gopalbuva Walangkar, Shivram Janaba Kamble and Kisan Phagu Bansod had created a wide awakening among the untouchables as to their age-long slavery and oppression. They had started organising, participating and 54 agitating for the issues of their rights and liberation. The credit to initiate the movement for the liberation of the untouchables undoubtedly goes to Mahatma Phooley. But with his inspiration and motivation the youngster from the untouchable castes themselves organized and executed their programmes. They received supports from caste Hindus as well. The Brahmins and other non-Brahmin caste Hindus like Marathas etc. Contributed their share in this newly emerged Dalit, untouchable movement. However, before the emergence of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his Dalit movement all the previous Dalit movements worked in a confined manner. Firstly, they campaigned their awareness programme through newspaper articles and some booklets. Secondly, they submitted petitions to the Government requesting its consideration. Thirdly, their reach to the untouchable castes in the Maharashtra was very limited, regional. ⁵⁵ There was no national level movement of the untouchables as yet, though there had been a regional pioneers like Mahatma Phooley in Maharashtra and Narayan Guru in Kerala. It was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who with his charismatic leadership, tremendous ability, superior knowledge, pragmatic vision and above all an indefatigable zeal to liberate his brethren reached the Dalit movement throughout the India, stirring the untouchables to agitate and organize for the implementation of different programs, giving different dimensions to the movement and fighting it on various fronts. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar fought his battle on all the fronts such as educational, social, religious, political, constitutional, literary, ideological and philosophical. Therefore, his movement became revolutionary and brought about revolutionary changes in the lives of Dalits, the Untouchables.

Conclusion:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who widened the scope of Dalit movement, expanded it to the boundaries of the country, utilized every resource and opportunity for its growth, and encountered every untoward condition and situation tightening his control over it.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar with his academic credentials, superior intellect, great acumen, tremendous resourcefulness, clear-cut vision and virtuous character set out for his life mission of liberating his brethren from the clutches of the age long slavery of untouchability, and to establish for them dignity and equality. He succeeded in a greater degree in his pursuance of it.

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