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Caste, Dalit and Subaltern Literature

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Abstract-- Maharshi Shinde, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Gadgebaba and Shahu Maharaj immensely contributed to Dalits educational, cultural, social, economical and political development. They have fought against the social system for the untouchables. The Dharmashastra and Varna system was the basis for maintaining this exploitative system. The literature helps to understand the contemporary condition of the society. Phule's *Trutiy Ratn*, Brahmanacha Kasab, Gulamgiri, Shetkaryancha Asud, Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak and Asprushyanchi Kaifiyat describe the reality. Dr. Ambedkar's *Castes in India*, *Annihilation of Caste*, *The Untouchables* and *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, *The Status and Minorities*, *Who were the Shudras?*. There are some positive changes in the caste system. But some Dalits are yet falling prey to all kinds of crime and hatred day in and day out which creates suspicion.

Keywords-- Dharmashastra, Varna system, Annihilation, Congress, Dalits and Shudras.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jyotirao has introduced the Marathi word 'dalit' which means broken, crushed of the traditional Varna system which was familiarized by the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s. The caste system in India is a creation of Brahmins, who defeated Dravidians /Dalits in a war and restricted their rights through classifying people into four Varna's. The fourth class of defeated Dravidians was named as shudra and intentionally they were deprived from all rights and freedom. 'Dharmashastra' was the basis for maintaining this exploitative system. Till today they are harassed by various means. The superior classes were treated inferior and they didn't have any right to take education, to earn and to survive on their own will. Dalits are said to be "Untouchables" according to Hindu culture. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar renamed them as 'Scheduled Caste' (SC). According to Dr. Ambedkar SCs are the castes which are deprived from educational, cultural, social, economical and political development. Dr. Babasaseb Ambedkar's contribution is incomparable as it was done by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and he got justice who had to fight hard for the rights of Dalits all his life.

The caste system is not natural but it is a social system. The people of the Dalit community were deliberately deprived of all human rights by the upper class people. Dalits' provision of different types of punishment was also made to deprive them from education and other human rights.

The upper class had complete control over education, religion legislation and judiciary. The British also did not show much interest in daily education till 1954. In the meantime, M. Phule, Sayajirao, Gaikwad and Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj took initiatives to give Dalit education though in the beginning it was on a small scale it helped to make the Dalits aware of their educational rights. Later, Dr. Ambedkar worked vehemently to transform this plant into a big tree. Babasaheb accepted the challenge of emancipating Dalits through education and providing them the rights deprived them from and gave legal status to Dalit education. Overall, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has done an unprecedented job in solving the educational and other problems of Dalits in critical situations. That is why this great man is known as the hero of the Dalits. He put pressure on the government to eradicate the narrow minded attitude towards Dalits and apathy towards Dalit education. He emphasized the importance of education to the Dalit class through his speeches at various places across the country and opened the doors of education for the Dalits by attacking the anti-Dalit orthodox tendency. He said, to prove that they are not merely to lead the path of personal happiness, but to lead their community to be free, to be strong and to be respected.

II. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To know the Indian Caste and Dalits.
- 2) To study about subaltern literature.
- 3) To focus on the solution for annihilation of the caste system mentioned by Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research study is mainly based on secondary data like internet, newspaper, books and available reference material and it gives a brief description of the situation of Dalits in India till today.

Historical background of Castes:

The Varna system is found in Hindu Dharma Shastra. It is divided into four Varna which are -Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. They believe in Brahma because Brahma is their God and he created the Varna. Brahmins followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and at last Shudras.

It is clear that Brahmins had the highest rank and Shudras had the lowest rank (at his feet). In India the main castes were further divided into about 3,000 main castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation. Such a society was formed in the ancient times and still survives in our country. Untouchable society has to live a life of slavery as below.

1. Prohibition of filling water in public places.
2. Pulling dead animals.
3. Telling news of the dead.
4. To serve the upper caste people.
5. Untouchables do not have access to the temple.
6. Prohibition on wearing new clothes and ornaments.
7. Prohibition on walking in public places or spitting.
8. Touching an upper caste person was considered ugly.
9. Prohibition to use ghee in meals.
10. Prohibition to take education.
11. Cleaning human excrement.
12. The shadow of untouchables was considered ugly

Many such social restrictions were imposed on the untouchable community by the upper castes.

Caste, Dalits and Subaltern Literature:

Mahatma Phule was the first defender of human equality and rights. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the first emancipator of the untouchables who attack the Chaturvarna and caste system and proclaim human equality. Gandhi called him “True Mahatma” while Savarkar called him “social revolutionary”. We should understand and appreciate the profound significance of his unflinching espousal of the rights of man which remained till the end of his life a major theme of his writings and a goal of his actions. He was the First revolutionary and leader of downtrodden, peasants and supporters of women’s education. He paved the way for the new era of social activism. He established many institutions and tried to remove manmade inequality. He was the first active leader of downtrodden and introduced us to humanity. He was a propagator of Human unity and national progress.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said “Mahatma Phule the greatest shudra of modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign.” M. Phule’s philosophy was based on facts, reality, experiences and observations. Phule’s views and philosophy was based on facts, reality, experiences and observation was a source of inspiration for Maharshi Shinde, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Gadgebaba and Shahu Maharaj.

He was a founder of many movements 1) Movement against discrimination (2) Movement of Dalit (3) Movement of women’s education. (4) Peasant’s movement. (5) Movement against blind faith.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule’s philosophy found in his following literature:

Trutiy Ratn

The play was written in 1855 and it is said that education is the third eye of man. The message was conveyed through a play. When a large section of our society was illiterate, Phule presented the mantra of social enlightenment to them through this play. He presented original ideas on destroying superstition, reducing the dominance of Brahmins, preventing conversion, raising the grievances of Shudras, etc. He highlighted the cunningness of Bhatji, the opportunism of Christians, the aggressive attitude of Muslims, etc. He presented the idea of throwing away the yoke of mental slavery by getting education and insisted that Shudras and Shudras should learn. While explaining the importance of education, the clown in the play says that “If Kunabya had learned knowledge by driving the plough, Joshi would have run away with his feet on the toe.” Phule attacked Brahmins and Joshi through this clown. It was also explained through the characters of the priest and Joshi that Brahmins and Muslims emphasize the importance of their respective religions.

Brahmanacha Kasab (1969): In this Phule has exposed the exploitation of downtrodden by the Brahmin priests.

Gulamgiri (1873): In this book he has given a historical survey of the slavery of lower castes. Narrate the history of Brahmin domination in India. He advised the people that religious epics are made by men and do not tolerate exploitation in the name of religion.

Shetkaryancha Asud (1883): In this book he has written on exploitation of peasants and has analyzed how peasants were being exploited in those days.

Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak (1891): In this book he put forward the concept of universal religion and threw light on blind faiths.

Asprushyanchi Kaifiyat (1893): In this book he discussed the crisis in Agriculture and suggested solutions of the agrarian problems.

In all these books his method of writing was very aggressive and courageous. His wet was a reaction against the social and religious system of Maharashtra. He said in the social system there was a domination of the upper caste and they were enjoying privileges. There were differences on the basis of caste, sex.

No human rights to downtrodden, only sufferings, inferior treatment, injustice, exploitation was there in the Society. This type of social system was supported by religious Puran and Vedas. Hence, Phule showed strong reaction against this. It sought to create a new culture in the society which is based on equality, justice and humanity.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was born in a caste considered untouchable who had to endure the torment of poverty and casteism from his childhood. For years, the untouchable community had to live a life of slavery. He experienced this from his childhood and Dr. Babasaheb took it upon himself to liberate the untouchable society from slavery. Ethnicity has persisted for years due to undesirable practices in Hinduism, caste system, deities, and superstitions. Therefore, Dr. Babasaheb recognized that the untouchables would not be freed from slavery without undermining casteism, and he wrote the book *Abolition of Caste System* in detail. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (14 April 1891 to 6 December 1956) was a great orator, a revolutionary of modern India, a theologian, a psychologist, a journalist, an internationally acclaimed man of the era, an architect of the Indian Constitution, a great man, a champion of Dalits, a women's emancipator, a social reformer, an educationist, an economist, a politician. His achievements are proven by different words. The revolutionary movement that laid the foundation for the cultural and social restructuring of India is the man of the era. Babasaheb is like a flash of lightning, a bright light and a voice for the dumb, we do not want a piece of thrown bread, and we want a storm that says this with self-respect. Thoughts and the country are bigger than the individual. This Dr. Babasaheb's thought was the core which had a revolutionary connection. Every step he took was of the national revolution. But it is sad that the people of the country examined his national role and work through the prism of the caste system.

Babasaheb had shed a drop of blood in the fight against inequality, untouchability, casteism and valueless culture in the country. He wrote the Hindu Code Bill as a manifesto for the social freedom of all the women of this country, but it has not been fully approved till date. So, even today the questions and problems of the women of the country have not been completely solved. This was due to the existence of a male-dominated culture everywhere in the world and due to the secondary position of women. The practice of keeping women away from many areas has been going on in society since ancient times. In the post-independence period, due to the spread of democracy and education, many sections of society became aware. And they started movements for their problems, along with the movements of the marginalized sections. They raised their problems through their own means.

Literature should not be just a means of entertainment, but should become a platform for thinking about social problems. Writing was done from this perspective. Dalit literature, rural literature, tribal literature and feminist literature are known to have raised the problems of Dalits, farmers and women in the flowing stream. This is a practice that even Ambedkar recognized. Some of his books were published in his lifetime while others came after his death. The below-listed Ambedkar's literature has an extensive swing. His analysis is powerful and precise. A brief description of the subject matter of his key books is given below.

IV. CASTES IN INDIA

Ambedkar wrote this research paper while he was in Columbia University, USA, in April 1916. It was published as a book in 1917. The book throws light on the origin, structure and development of castes in India. Ambedkar considers caste as a closed group that is self-contained. According to him, there are four aspects of the problem of caste in India:

- i) Despite being an admixture of different elements, the Hindus have a strong cultural unity.
- ii) Castes are a part of this gargantuan cultural identity.
- iii) Originally, there was only one caste.
- iv) Different castes came into being through ostracism or copying.

Annihilation of Caste book published in 1936, this is Ambedkar's best-known book. The Jaat-Paat Todak Mandal (The Forum for Breaking the Caste System) had invited Dr. Ambedkar to deliver the presidential address at the organization's annual session at Lahore in March 1936. However, when the organizers saw the draft of Ambedkar's speech, they got cold feet and requested Ambedkar to make changes in it. But Ambedkar refused point-blank. Later, the speech was published in the form of a book in 1936. The book is only a few pages long but is thought provoking. Dr. Ambedkar dwells on how to annihilate caste by attacking its very roots. He says: "If you have to breach this system, you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason; to the Vedas and Shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the religion of the Shrutis and the Smritis. Nothing else will avail."

It is clear that during the Peshwa period, the untouchables were not allowed to use the public road in the Maratha Mulkha so that the shadow of the untouchables would not fall on them.



In Pune, the capital of the Peshwas, which had to be built, the untouchables had to tie a broom around their waist so that a Hindu's foot would not fall on the dust defiled by the touch of their feet. So that the dust on his back would be wiped off and the steps would be wiped clean. If his spit falls on the road and someone inadvertently walks on it, it can be ugly, so the untouchables in Pune used to have pots around their necks for you wherever they went.

What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables

This book, also published in 1945, scrutinizes the work that the Congress and Gandhi have done for the Untouchables and pulls them up for not being on the right track. The book argues that the Congress used the issue of emancipation of the Shudras as a tool for furthering its political interests. It says the Congress' programme for emancipation of the Shudras is more about publicity and less about sincere efforts. The book urges Dalits to be wary of Gandhi and Gandhism. According to Dr. Ambedkar, if there is any "ism" in the world that has used religion as an opiate to subdue the masses and has fed them wrong concepts and hollow promises, it is Gandhism. Gandhism cheats the Untouchables.

Who were the Shudras? The book explores and analyzes the history of the origin of the Shudras. It says that "Shudra" is not merely an etymological term but has historical connotations. Ambedkar writes that those who are called Shudras today were once Survanshi Aryan Kshatriyas.

The Status and Minorities book was published in March 1946. Here, Dr. Ambedkar presents an outline of a socialist society and forcefully argues that socialism should be ushered in India through Constitutional provisions so that the legislature and the executive will not be able to tinker with it. He says that parliamentary democracy is a just system of governance and state socialism should be introduced in India through parliamentary democracy.

The Untouchables book, published in October 1948, dwells on how untouchability originated. Armed with credible evidence, Dr. Ambedkar has proven that, "The Untouchables were the vanquished people who were declared Untouchables as they had embraced Buddhism and had refused to give up eating beef." Ambedkar contends that the practice of untouchability must have originated around 400 AD. His conclusion is that untouchability was the product of the battle for supremacy between the Buddhist and the Brahmanical religions.

Measures Suggested by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for Caste Annihilation:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had suggested some measures to eradicate the caste system in India. He basically made three recommendations to eliminate the caste system.

1. Destroying faith in the sanctity of theology
2. Inter-dining between castes
3. Inter-caste marriage

The eradication of the caste system in India is not as easy as it sounds. The caste system has become an inherent part of the lives and mentalities of many Indians. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has done the work of eradicating it. Constitutional laws enacted by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to abolish caste system:

1. Protection of civil Act 1955
Section-7-c, Section-10-c, Section-14-c, Section-15-c, Section-16- k is fixed
2. Special Marriage Act 1954
3. Religion Act/ 1950

Above Acts is most important to protect untouchable people and many more laws like this Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has done for the abolition of caste system. If these laws had not been enacted, the picture of the present situation of Dalits in India would have been very different.

V. RECENT SITUATION OF CASTE IN INDIA:

Have we annihilated caste in this 21st century? The answer to this question is 'NO'. Eighty years ago the path which Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar suggested it needed to be revisited by us. We have not yet annihilated caste because the mindset of some people has not changed till now. Since Dalits continue to swell the ranks of Hindu religion which seem to have strengthened it. To embrace other religions, many have left Hinduism but even there they have taken shelter under the very blind devotion and irrational ritualism that Babasaheb and Buddha thundered against. On the other hand, hapless Dalits are falling prey to all kinds of crime and hatred day in and day out. Following are some examples of such cases: Una whipping case (2016), Rohith Vemula's institutional murder case (2016), Khairlanji mayhem case (2006), Laxmanpur Bathe slaughtercase (1997) and Tsundur massacre case (1991), Bhima Koregaon Violence case in Pune district (1st Jan. 2018), etc. Many such cases are still happening in our country today.

So how do we annihilate caste? The answer is obviously not simple but has to be based upon the ways shown by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and built upon the experiences that we can gather from what happened in the 70 years since our proclaimed independence.

VI. FINDINGS

Some of the positive changes in the caste system are as follows. M. Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Karmveer Bhaurao Patil, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has spent his entire life for the rights, entitlements and welfare of the poor. Dr. Babasaheb has made legal provisions for this.

1. Filling water in public places
2. Temple entry
3. Inter-caste marriages thus narrowing the gap between castes
4. Freedom of business
5. Caste identity symptoms disappeared
6. Freedom of reading and writing
7. Freedom of conversion
8. Freedom to acquire wealth
9. Right to education
10. Freedom of conduct and thought etc.

Babasaheb expected social structure on the triad of freedom, equality and fraternity. He made provision in the constitution, so positive changes are beginning to appear in the future. Although the caste system has not been eradicated, the intensity of the caste system has definitely decreased. Babasaheb's contribution is invaluable as it was only Babasaheb who made the change possible.

VII. CONCLUSION

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar sharply criticized the class inequality on which Hindu society was based. He said that Hindu society is like a pyramid with many floors and no staircase or doors. The one who is born on any floor should die on the same floor. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideal of annihilation of caste. A true Dalit/Bahujan force wedded to Ambedkar's ideals, Periyar's Cultural Revolution and Phule's social justice is the need of the hour to create a bulwark against Brahmanism and ultimately annihilate caste, the bane of our existence.

So, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Periyar and Mahatma Phule have made invaluable literature to the abolition of the Indian caste system.

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