

Annihilation of Caste: A Comparative Study between Basaveshwara and Ambedkar.

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Introduction:

The caste system in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE. The term caste was first used by Portuguese travelers who came to India in the 16th century. Caste comes from the Spanish and Portuguese word "casta" which means "race", "breed", or "lineage". Many Indians use the term "jati". There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, each related to a specific occupation. These different castes fall under four basic varnas:

Brahmins--priests & teachers

Kshatriyas--warriors & rulers

Vaishyas— farmers, traders & merchants

Shudras--laborers

Caste not only dictates one's occupation, but dietary habits and interaction with members of other castes as well. Members of a high caste enjoy more wealth and opportunities while members of a low caste perform menial jobs. Outside of the caste system are the Untouchables. Untouchable jobs, such as toilet cleaning and garbage removal, require them to be in contact with bodily fluids. They are therefore considered polluted and not to be touched. The importance of purity in the body and food is found in early Sanskrit literature. Untouchables have separate entrances to homes and must drink from separate wells. They are considered to be in a permanent state of impurity. Untouchables were named "Harijans" (Children of God) by Gandhi. He tried to raise their status with symbolic gestures such as befriending and eating with Untouchables. Upward mobility is very rare in the caste system. Most people remain in one caste their entire life and marry within their caste.

The leaders of independent India decided that India will be democratic, socialist and secular country. According to this policy there is a separation between religion and state. Practicing untouchability or discriminating a person based on his caste is legally forbidden. Along with this law the government allows positive discrimination of the depressed classes of India.

The Indians have also become more flexible in their caste system customs. In general the urban people in India are less strict about the caste system than the rural. In cities one can see different caste people mingling with each other, while in some rural areas there is still discrimination based on castes and sometimes also on untouchability. Sometimes in villages or in the cities there are violent clashes which, are connected to caste tensions. Sometimes the high castes strike the lower castes who dare to uplift their status. Sometimes the lower caste get back on the higher castes.

In modern India the term caste is used for Jat and also for Varna. The term, caste was used by the British who ruled India until 1947. The British who wanted to rule India efficiently made lists of Indian communities. They used two terms to describe Indian communities. Castes and Tribes. The term caste was used for Jats and also for Varnas. Tribes were those communities who lived deep in jungles, forests and mountains far away from the main population and also communities who were hard to be defined as castes for example communities who made a living from stealing or robbery. These lists, which the British made, were used later on by the Indian governments to create lists of communities who were entitled for positive discrimination.

The castes, which were the elite of the Indian society, were classified as high castes. The other communities were classified as lower castes or lower classes. The lower classes were listed in three categories. The first category is called Scheduled Castes. This category includes in it communities who were untouchables. In modern India, untouchability exists at a very low extent. The untouchables call themselves Dalit, meaning depressed. Until the late 1980s they were called Harijan, meaning children of God. This title was given to them by Mahatma Gandhi who wanted the society to accept untouchables within them.

The second category is Scheduled Tribes. This category includes in it those communities who did not accept the caste system and preferred to reside deep in the jungles, forests and mountains of India, away from the main population. The Scheduled Tribes are also called Adivasi, meaning aboriginals.

The third category is called sometimes Other Backward Classes or Backward Classes. This category includes in it castes who belong to Sudra Varna and also former untouchables who converted from Hinduism to other religions. This category also includes in it nomads and tribes who made a living from criminal acts.

According to the central government policy these three categories are entitled for positive discrimination. Sometimes these three categories are defined together as Backward Classes. 15% of India's population are Scheduled Castes. According to central government policy 15% of the government jobs and 15% of the students admitted to universities must be from Scheduled Castes. For the Scheduled Tribes about 7.5% places are reserved which is their proportion in Indian population. The Other Backwards Classes are about 50% of India's population, but only 27% of government jobs are reserved for them.

Along with the central government, the state governments of India also follow a positive discrimination policy. Different states have different figures of communities entitled for positive discrimination based on the population of each state. Different state governments have different lists of communities entitled for positive discrimination. Sometimes a specific community is entitled for rights in a particular state but not in another state of India.

In modern India new tensions were created because of these positive discrimination policies. The high caste communities feel discriminated by the

government policy to reserve positions for the Backward Classes. In many cases a large number of high caste members compete for a few places reserved for them. While the Backward Classes members do not have to compete at all because of the large number of reserved places for them compared to the candidates. Sometimes in order to fill the quota, candidates from the lower classes are accepted even though they are not suitable. Sometimes some reserved positions remain unmanned because there were few candidates from the lower classes causing more tension between the castes. Between the lower castes there are also tensions over reservation.

In the order of priority for a reserved place of the Backward Classes, candidate from the Scheduled castes is preferred over a candidate from the Scheduled Tribes who is preferred over a candidate from the other Backward Classes. As stated earlier Other Backward Classes are about 50% of India's population but only 27% of the Other Backward Classes are entitled for positive discrimination according to central government policy. Some Other Backward Classes communities are organizing politically to be recognized as Backward Classes entitled for positive discrimination.

The Scheduled Tribes who are seen as the aborigines of India got ownership and certain rights over Indian land. Many communities in India claim also to be aborigines of India and they are claiming the same rights as the Scheduled Tribes.

The caste identity has become a subject of political, social and legal interpretation. Communities who get listed as entitled for positive discrimination do not get out of this list even if their social and political conditions get better. In many cases the legal system is involved to decide if a certain person is entitled for positive discrimination.

But with all this positive discrimination policy, most of the communities who were low in the caste hierarchy remain low in the social order even today. And communities who were high in the social hierarchy remain even today high in the social hierarchy. Most of the degrading jobs are even today done by the Dalits, while the Brahmans remain at the top of the hierarchy by being the doctors, engineers and lawyers of India.

Statement of the Problem:

The present study proposes to throw light on

the philosophy of Sri Basaveshwara and Dr. Ambedkar and their ideas on the caste and its annihilation. The objective of Basaveshwara's movement was also to liberate men and women from the most oppressive practice of untouchability observed unscrupulously by the caste Hindus and to bring the former on a par with socio-cultural level of the society. He argued for abolition of caste system, varnashrama, untouchability and inhuman practices, dogmas, and blind beliefs and rituals like Sati, suppression of women.

Basaveshwara and Ambedkar born in different environment and with diverse background and were separated by 800 years. Basava was born in 1132 A.D in a Brahmin family, highest caste in Indian social order and Ambedkar was born to a Mahar family, lowest caste in Indian social hierarchy. Both undertook massive revolutionary movements to change the inequality in the social order which is based on Caste system.

No two socio-religious revolutionary leaders converge in their thought and actions as Basava of 12th Century and Ambedkar of 20th Century do. There are not merely reformists, they didn't deal with symptoms of the diseases, but concentrated on root cause of the disease i.e Caste system. They both fought for, not just reform, but complete annihilation of caste system.

Basaveshwara Views:

Basava outlined his philosophy of life and religion in the language of people, in a literary genre called Vachanas, acclaimed by scholars for its beauty, brevity and boldness. He said that religion was meant to man, and to illuminate man's life. In order to liberate oppressed man from slavery of Caste system, he founded new religion based on spiritual equality, self-respect, liberty of worship, fraternity.

Basava introduced the concept of Isth Linga, in place of Sthavara Linga (temple installed Linga). This fundamentally changed the ethos of man-god relationship. The rejection of Sthavara Linga meant rejection of temple which was totally inaccessible to Untouchables and full of priest exploitation and installed sanctity by declaring body of itself as temple. Linga deeshka which the followers of Basava were entitled to, became symbol of spiritual equality.

In his fight against untouchability, Basava decaste himself by shedding his Brahmin birth

declaring himself the son of slaves: "Cobbler Chennayya and Kakkayya's daughter". Basava questioned the rationale of discrimination by saying "when all men are born were composed of the same seven fluids (dhatus) and came out of the same womb and when on the same earth stands the outcast's hovel and the deity's temple, why this discrimination" and advocated its annihilation.

Ambedkar Views:

Ambedkar was born in a mahar family and victim of Caste system, he experienced many incidents in his life, where he was insulted, humiliated because of his Caste. He argued that castes as discrete entities has to be distinguished from the caste system based on the principle of graded inequality. The principle of governing Varna System and Caste System is same, both of them upheld graded inequality and subscribe to the doctrine of birth rather than Worth.

Ambedkar opined that caste had made Hindu society stagnant. Due to caste system, Hindu society is unable to accommodate outsiders. This poses permanent problems to Integration. Internally, Hindu society fails to satisfy as homogenous society, as it was only a conglomerate of different castes. It is an obstacle to growth of national spirit and perpetrates injustice on lower castes.

This has resulted in moral degradation and demoralization of the lower castes. The Untouchables, were the constant object of injustice. They were denied education, good livelihood and human dignity. Their very idea that by mere touch of one human being pollutes another shows the gross level of inequality and brutality to which caste system has sunk. Therefore, the battle for the removal of untouchability becomes the battle for Human rights and justice.

Ambedkar rejected Hinduism as it is opposed to his concept of religion and it has resulted into a exploitative system. He held the view that, "The center of religion is man, the base is morality, test of justice and utility must be applied to judge the relevance of a religion and that consists in the trinity ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity".

Objectives of the Study:

The present research was undertaken with the following objectives

1. To study the life of Sri Basaveshwar and his socio-political thoughts and fight against orthodox socio-religious practices in Indian society during his time.
2. To study the life of Dr. Ambedkar and his socio-political thoughts and fight against orthodox socio-religious practices in Indian society.
3. To examine the similarities of Basaveshwara and Dr. Ambedkar for annihilation of caste.
4. To critically evaluate the Relevance and Significance of Basaveshwara and Dr. Ambedkar thought in Contemporary Indian Society specially for annihilation of caste.

Hypothesis of the Study:

Based on the study of some sources, the following hypotheses Were framed for the present research

1. There was a need to launch reform movements for eradication of untouchability during time of Basaveshwara
2. Basaveshwara, the great social reformer of 12th century contributed significantly to annihilate caste.
3. Basaveshwara and his other followers (sharanas) made their writings (vachanas) as tool to bring socio-religious equality in the society.
4. Dr. Ambedkar championed the socio-religious and political rights of the untouchables
5. Dr. Ambedkar made law and Indian constitution as the tool for emancipation and empowerment of women in India.

Research Methodology

In the present study, Research methodology consisting of data collection, synthesis analysis (historical) is followed; descriptive and analytical methods are followed in picturing the life and contributions of Basaveshwara and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Both primary and secondary data are used in the present research. These sources were collected from various libraries. The primary data consist of original published and unpublished work of Basaveshwara, sharanas and Dr. Ambedkar in the form of their vachanas and writings and speeches. The secondary data used here are in the form of published material articles in journals, reports, reviews and books by researchers. As the present research is empirical and historical in nature no scale, interview schedule or questionnaire was found

necessary, similarly statistical analysis is not followed in presenting the themes.

Review of Related Literature

There are a good number of Vachanas, in the Kannada literature, comprising the valuable thoughts of Basaveshwara and sharanas. These Vachanas will be primary source for the understanding of the concept of social justice and women empowerment of Basaveshwar. Number of puranic works and philosophical treaties, which help in understanding Basaveshwara and his ideas, are also available. The life and mission of Basaveshwara as well as his contribution towards social reformation will also help in analyzing his role as emancipator of weak and oppressed women. Many works like writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar published by him which are reprinted and re-published from time to time are available in various libraries.

A number of social scientists have also thrown sufficient light on Basaveshwara's philosophy. There are a numbers of books on Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar was able to devote himself to such a mission and formulated views on all aspects of caste.

It may be observed that very few attempts have been made, in the past to compare or synthesize the works of different philosophers in a comparative analytical frame work, Studies on „Buddha and Basaveshwara“ by Sri Kumar swamiji indicate an attempt in this direction.

There are some comparative studies in Kannada like Basaveshwara and Ambedkar. But, no attempt has been made on the comparative study of Basaveshwara and Ambedkar regarding their role in women empowerment. The present comparative study of Basaveshwara and Ambedkar in a scientific way helps to synthesize an integrated policy for social change which is the need of hour to India in particular and to the world in general.