

Third Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture

DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

Critique and Reconstruction

Delivered by
PROF. Y.B. DAMLE
Professor Emeritus
University of Poona
Pune (Maharashtra)



1999

**Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology
Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067**

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PREFACE

The contemporary post-modernist discourse unacknowledgedly endorses the Hegelian thesis and anti-thesis of ideas, or for that matter, Marxian thesis and anti-thesis of the dialectical materialism, and its resultant outcome of synthesis. But if a social reformer, statesman and visionary of a new type of society or social order looks at the existing society with his scholastic acumen, forthrightness and a clear vision of the future, he not only remains a critic of it but he, rather, deconstructs the contemporary social reality obviously of the unjustifiable nature and tries to reconstruct a new one. This new social reality—society or social order may imbibe in it a few noble attributes of the past society, of course, with the interpretations commensurate to modern needs or requirements, and a few more attributes drawn from other societies which he finds necessary. But in the case of the latter, the attributes are re-interpreted in accordance with the needs or requirements of the host society as visioned and to be evolved in future.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar happens to be one such personality who severely criticized the chopping off the people of India particularly of the Hindu society or social system in the artificially created gradations of superior and inferior types placed in the notional yet religiously and socially sanctioned and legitimized hierarchy. Coming from the inferior most strata of such hierarchy yet reaching to the highest level of achievement, he himself remained the victim of untouchability and discriminations inherent in the Hindu caste system for

most of his life. Thence, coupled with his own experiences and that of the millions of his people as well as with full knowledge of a free society existed especially during the time of Lord Buddha and its foreseeability in the modern era, he tried to deconstruct the Hindu society lacking freeness based on *equality, liberty and fraternity*, i.e., social justice. He has then proposed to reconstruct a free society or social order consisting of (a) individuals being end in themselves and the society being means to facilitate the growth and development of their personality of the required type, and the subordination of such individuals, if needed, to the society for their betterment; and (b) the conjoined living of these individuals based on equality, liberty and fraternity—in a word—social justice.

The Third Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture, delivered on 8 September 1999 by Prof. Y.B. Damle of the University of Pune (Maharashtra), touches broadly upon some aspects of Ambedkar's above mentioned critique-deconstruction of the Hindu society and his efforts for its reconstruction, or rather that of the Indian society as such. More precisely, the author has elaborately analysed Dr. Ambedkar's religious struggle through the Mahad Satyagraha movement for accord of the legitimate right of the Untouchables to use the water of the Chavadar Lake or tank of the Mahad taluka in the Kolaba district of Maharashtra. This was a movement for vilifying the traditional practice of untouchability and ascertaining the justified claim of equality of the Untouchables. He has also concentrated on Ambedkar's attack on the *Khoti system* and the *Mahar vatan* (title to land in lieu of free services rendered by the Mahars to the village-folk and the government officials) which remained as such part of the *Balute system* (system of the patron-client relations) in Maharashtra. In this regard, Prof. Damle emphasizes the economic basis of the progress of the Untouchables, and refers to Dr. Ambedkar's advice to them to leave the villages and move to towns and cities for bondage-free better living and embrace equality at least in comparative, if not absolute, sense. The author even unfolds the multi-facet, particularly the liberal attitude and behaviour, of Ambedkar who has grossly been

misunderstood as an arrogant and a bitter critic of Hindus especially the Brahmins. But above all, the author has successfully portrayed Ambedkar as a modern man, with a vision of looking forward for the evolution of a new society or social order based on equality, liberty and fraternity as anchored in the thoughts and philosophy of Lord Buddha.

Readers of the text of this Memorial Lecture may, however, encounter with two kinds of problems: one, they may find repetition, at several places, of the issues addressed by Ambedkar; two, author of the text has relied exclusively on the editorials and other articles of Ambedkar, and a few others of the *Mooknayak* (January 1920–March 1927) and the *Bahishkrit Bharat* (April 1927–5 November 1929)—both Marathi fortnightly edited and published by Ambedkar himself. Since he has done not literal but free translation from Marathi to English, one may get often confused about authenticity of certain ideas if these were of Ambedkar himself, or a few events, narrated in the text, in which he actually participated, or these have been interpolated in the English translation.

This gets fructified easily in event of non-availability of the original Marathi texts of both the fortnightly at this stage. Yet, I am sure about the social scientists and the students as well, working on the Dalit issues in general and the thoughts and philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar in particular, would be greatly benefited from this text which is a seminal contribution in the field of such study.

10 November, 1999
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi.

Nandu Ram
Dr. Ambedkar Chair
Professor of Sociology

DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

Critique and Reconstruction

Y.B. Damle

I certainly feel very honoured to be called upon to deliver Ambedkar Memorial Lecture. Ambedkar holds a special place in Indian society for his indefatigable scholarship and even more so persistent action to change society for the better.

Introduction

It is a common place of sociology that any social order is not necessarily palatable to all its constituents, particularly when they have no say whatsoever in shaping it. This is poignantly so in the case of Indian society in general and Hindu society in particular. As all of us know, Hindu society has accepted and continue to implement the traditional logic and ideology of creating and perpetuating a certain kind of social order. Obviously what is implied is the *Caturvarnya* (*Chaturvarnya*) system (and its off shoot of the system of castes numbering into thousands), which has defined and dictated social relations and, of course, duties, deprivation and disprivileges. This is even more disturbing because of the static nature of the order, so that those who were placed at the lowest rank were denied any prospects of improvement in their situation. To put it in a nutshell, what is implied is the perennial plight of the untouchables. This situation got

perpetuated by the intricate tying up of religion, ideology, economy and polity. To make matters worse, even in the twentieth century, its first half and even the latter half, knowledge—the basic component of human development—was permanently denied to certain sections of society.

The autonomy of knowledge has been questioned and its umbilical relationship to social framework is well taken. Thus, perceptual knowledge, knowledge of 'we' and 'they', technical knowledge, political knowledge, is directly related to social ordering, which is essentially asymmetrical. In the case of untouchables, the relationship is taken for granted, and the ideological basis, which is paraded, makes them accept it without any complaint whatsoever (however, they have started questioning that since the last century). Apportioning of knowledge in terms of strata or denying it to some strata entirely is resented and questioned when the doors of education are opened. In short, the very type and basis of knowledge is questioned and demand is made for acquiring every type of knowledge, so that there is no arbitrary division in society on the basis of shutting off of certain kinds of knowledge for certain individuals.

Dr. Ambedkar, both because of his scholarship and training, and also because of his placement in Hindu society at the lowest rung of the ladder, was naturally and avidly propounder for demanding the right of knowledge to everyone. He had clearly perceived the lack of knowledge, ignorance, superstition and meek acceptance of all the deprivations and disprivileges imposed on those placed at the lowest rung of the ladder (namely the Untouchables or the today's Scheduled Castes or the Dalits). This imposition was sought to be legitimized by the theory of *Caturvarnya*. In fact, the untouchables were kept even outside the pale of *Caturvarnya*, and as such were occupying the most vulnerable position in society. Ambedkar very rightly felt that in order to prepare his fellowmen for any appropriate action so as to change the situation radically in their favour, it was very important to communicate effectively with them so as to convey and convince them of the injustice meted out to them for centuries together.

That is why, Ambedkar started publishing *Mooknayak* and *Bahiskrut (Bahiskrit) Bharat* subsequently. Of course, there was a strong tradition of Dalit journalism of which Ambedkar was very conscious. Mr. Valangkar can be properly regarded as the first Dalit journalist. He had retired from the army and was very well read, and published a booklet *Destruction Due To Ostracism*. Not only that Mr. Valangkar was agitated by the plight of the untouchables but he also, and very rightly, questioned the treatment meted out to Kshatriyas by the Brahmins, denying them of rights of performing prestigious rituals. He had founded an association called *Anaryadosh Pariharak Mandal*, and he had sent memorandum to British officers regarding the plight of the untouchables. Shivram Kamble and Kisan Phagu Bansode rendered yeomen's service to Dalit journalism by their contribution. It was very significant that Mrs. Bansode participated in the meetings, at that time of the *Mandal*. The association mentioned above was also in contact with Mr. M.G. Ranade. This speaks of the awakening and systematic efforts made to plead the cause of untouchables in a fairly effective manner.

Contents of Ambedkar's Marathi Writing

The journals *Mookanayak* and *Bahiskrut (Bahiskrit) Bharat* mentioned above were naturally published in Marathi and were first to reach the common man. As all of us know, Ambedkar has written copiously in English language, which is easily available to English reading public and scholars. However, his writings in Marathi in these journals are not accessible easily. And, therefore, I chose to use his Marathi writings. Further, I decided to entirely depend on his these writings and, of course, the writings in the journals, instead of going by what 'others' had to say.

Basically, the writings in the journals comprise of editorials written by Ambedkar on various issues, ranging from the genesis of the imposition of untouchability and the various socio-economic, cultural and political arrangements to important events in human history, such as the French revolution. These he chose so as to provide an alternate model for social reconstruction.

Explaining the rationale for starting an independent press for the untouchables, Ambedkar has very rightly observed that the press in Maharashtra, which was dominated by the Brahmins, had no interest whatsoever in highlighting the wounds and sufferings of the untouchables, by and large. Similar was the case even of the non-Brahmin press, which was concerned with pleading the cause of the rights of the masses, including the new entrants, that is the non-Brahmins, to modern education, occupation and political representation. But it, by and large, chose to be silent about the plight of the untouchables. Naturally, it was imperative to have a special journal for the untouchables so as to start an effective dialogue with the fellowmen and educate them about the various problems and issues affecting them. At the same time, Ambedkar very much welcomed writings from the high caste Hindus, who were convinced about the unjustness of the prevailing social order. In addition to the editorials, there was a lively discussion of current problems. Similarly, special place was accorded for exchange of ideas and comparing notes.

The editorials by Ambedkar were basically addressed to the religious struggle at Mahad, and the responsibility of the upper caste Hindus as well as the British Government. Similarly, the farce of extrication of untouchability, by some Hindu organizations, was also discussed and exposed. The Mahars and their vatans occupied a very important place in these editorials, since Ambedkar was convinced that unless and until the Mahar vatans were abolished, the Mahars could not leave the village and migrate to urban areas. Considerable importance is given to *satyagraha* and its philosophy, as well as the course of action to be followed so as to draw pointed attention of the caste Hindus in particular and others too in respect of the denial of public utility such as access to public resource like water to untouchables. The Mahad *satyagraha* naturally occupies a very important place in these writings. In the way, the hypocrisy of the Hindus and the disjunction between Hindu philosophy and action has also been pointed out. The economic basis of the degradation of the untouchables has been highlighted; and, similarly, the importance of political

representation also finds a place. Concrete suggestions are made to improve the position of the exploited. The concept of revolution is discussed. Cognizance is taken of the opponents of social inequality and an attempt is made to meet the various responses and criticisms of readers; and in short, the mechanisms of feed-back is built into these editorials.

Discussion of current problems and occasional thoughts also centre around the action programme for improvement of the plight of the untouchables in particular and the exploited in general. Contributions of caste Hindus were specially invited to discuss about the *Caturvarnya* and its disastrous consequences, importance of nation-building and, therefore, the supreme necessity of doing away with arbitrary divisions in society, a frank and forthright analysis of the linkage between religion, ideology, economy, polity and culture, etc.

Editorials

One of the most significant aspects of Ambedkar's writing is abiding concern for establishing link between the traditional idiom and the demands of the new situation. While he categorically rejects the theory of *Caturvarnya* as delineated in Bhagavat Gita, he draws upon the concept and philosophy of Satyagraha—insistence on the pursuit of truth, and following the required path of action for attaining this end. This can be cited as an example of both deconstruction and reconstruction. It could be of interest to know that in his discussion of Satyagraha, he alludes to the emphasis on Satyagraha placed by B.G. Tilak. Similarly, he also refers to Tilak's views about the necessity of changing patterns of social interaction and a relationship in the light of new situations. In fact, Ambedkar has emphasized the dynamic nature of values as they were adumbrated by Tilak. In his exhortation about the importance of Satyagraha, he tries to enlist the willing cooperation of saner elements from high caste Hindus by appealing to their good sense. Criticism is tempered with persuading in a very remarkable fashion. Even the very title of the editorials emphasise his persistent effort to establish link between the high caste Hindu journalism or rather the Brahmin press and

that of the Untouchables. One such title is *Reviving the Struggle, 'Punasch Hari Om'*, a title of one of Tilak's important editorials in *Kesari*. Likewise, Ambedkar's editorials are replete with traditional quotations from Sanskrit, and chaste Marathi of the (low caste) saint poets. The point to emphasise is simply his linkage with all that he regards as good and worthwhile in the tradition, at the same time attacking the basic unjustness of that traditional social order. Ambedkar wants to involve the British Government in facilitating his course of action, namely Satyagraha. Symbolically though it is very significant that at the time of Mahad Chavdar Satyagraha, he specially kept a photo print of Mahatma Gandhi*, a devotee of non-violent satyagraha. Of course, he invokes his fellowmen to follow the path of satyagraha in a disciplined manner, notwithstanding any provocation from others. There is a very detailed discussion about the path of satyagraha which goes to emphasise Ambedkar's thinking and remarkable sense of realism. No wonder that he advocated abjuring of violence in any form.

The launching of satyagraha was not a lark as it were, but a matter of systematic and sustained preparation. Such preparation was naturally more confined to Kolaba, where the satyagraha was to be launched, and at the same time, to preparing the ground for satyagraha in Bombay and other district places of Maharashtra. One cannot but be impressed by his remarkable capacity of prethinking, planning and organization. Thought and action were sought to be made coterminous. In fact, no course of action was to be undertaken without adequate intellectual and moral preparedness. The *Council of the Ostracised* in Kolaba district naturally finds a special place, although the organization and work of similar organizations in other parts of Maharashtra has also come in for adequate mention and appreciation. In the presidential speech during the Mahad satyagraha, Ambedkar emphasized

* This is entirely the author's view, and the Dr. Ambedkar Chair in J.N.U., New Delhi does not endorse it in absence of the original Marathi source at this stage.

the importance of launching as well as promoting the idea of inherent equality of human beings. It is in this context that he made special reference to French revolution which had ushered in the important principle of human dignity, liberty and fraternity. Similarly, the French revolution also advocated abolition of all kinds of arbitrary differentiations between human beings, e.g., no title or honour should be a privilege of any particular group or class, nor should anyone be kept away from access to important resources, like education, status if not power. The right of self-determination is emphasized as against the imposition of any political authority. Instead of birth, individual achievement has to be respected for which all the necessary resources should be made available.

The discussion on Dharmashastras of the Hindus, and the farce of extrication of untouchability clearly point out the cleavage between thought and action, masking the ugly reality with high flown philosophy. Ambedkar castigates the suggestions on the part of Hindu leaders to construct separate places of worship for the untouchables. Likewise, he also ridicules the programme of common public diners for the caste Hindus and the untouchables. He clearly saw the thorough hollowness of such steps, which only meant the hoodwinking of the main issue of the basic inequality imposed by the Hindu system. Without education, meaningful occupation, cash income and freedom to move as well as to associate, such tinkering would be of no use. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of developing a proper dialogue between the untouchables and the high caste Hindus. He had very clearly realized the importance of a meaningful dialogue, so that the change of views and ideas could facilitate adoption of a new type of social relationship. It is indeed remarkable that, all the time, he has been able to draw upon the high caste Hindus in his various programmes of struggle. Mr. Chitre, who belonged to the high caste Hindus, played a leading role in the Mahad Satyagraha. Apart from enlisting good-will and cooperation of the high caste Hindus, Ambedkar open-heartedly welcomed and appreciated the help rendered by a Muslim landlord in Mahad, who made his ground available

for the untouchables to launch the satyagraha. Ambedkar has stated, time and again, that he is not against Brahmins as a caste, but their Brahmanya, that is the arrogant consciousness of their high caste and their actions to exploit the untouchables in particular. In the same vein, he has also castigated the non-Brahmins who suffered from the spell of Brahmanya.

The Mahar Vatan

The system of Mahar Vatan, which was introduced by the British, has been one of the main causes of the stagnation of the Mahars (untouchables) in villages. The vatan, while it enables some payment in cash to the Mahar for the duties he performs for the village in addition to a piece of land for cultivation, renders him to be completely immobile and stuck to the village economy and society. Mahar is at the receiving end and has no freedom or independence of any kind. The vatan has created a false sense of security, because of which the Mahar is not able to look beyond the village. In this context, the Scottish religious experiment is quoted, because it depicts the importance of migration, economic development and individual freedom. Ambedkar had prepared a bill to be passed by the Bombay Legislative Assembly; and much to his anguish and disappointment, it was defeated by the landlords and even the ordinary farmers who belonged to the non-Brahmin castes. In this case also, Ambedkar had addressed several meetings in order to clarify the doubts and suspicions of the farmer class, and explained to them about the rationality of abolishing of Mahar vatans. He had quoted, with approval, the bold step taken by Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur in abolishing the Mahar vatans, and the beneficial consequences arising out of it. But to no avail, the bill was defeated. Similarly, he has written on the *Khoti* system which is another instrument of exploitation.

The Economic Basis of the Progress of the Untouchables

Ambedkar is extremely clear in his mind that without ensuring the economic basis and improvement of the untouchables, their plight would never be changed. It is in

this context that he speaks of the class in general, and the untouchables in particular, who had been denied access to certain sections in textile industries such as the carding unit. This situation persisted late in the 1950s, which has been documented by Damle (no reference of it is given). The persistence of such situation makes Ambedkar quite unenthusiastic about labour leadership (communists), who were totally insensitive to the problems of untouchables, while they talked of the revolution of the labouring class in an abstract form at the International level. Therefore Ambedkar defines and delineates what constitutes revolution, particularly in the Indian context, and even more so, for the untouchables. Only when the scourge of untouchability and all types of arbitrary divisions among the human beings are totally annihilated, revolution could be regarded as having taken place. Otherwise, the bookish revolution does not impress him. Any vestige of inequality has to be stamped out.

Our Critics

Ambedkar tries to explain his critics, whether they be from Brahmin castes, non-Brahmin castes or untouchables, that the movement he has launched is for the benefit of all the exploited castes and classes, and not confined to the guarding of the interests of a particular caste from the untouchables, that is the Mahars. At the same time, he has also appreciated the changing attitudes on the part of some high caste Hindus, particularly the Brahmins and even more so Mr. S.B. Tilak, the son of B.G. Tilak who welcomed him in Kesari Wada. Barrister Jaykar, Shankaran Nair, Chitnavis and several other high caste Hindus had offered their cooperation by addressing the forum which Ambedkar had provided in the shape of conferences and meetings. He also mentions K.F. Nariman and Subhash Chandra Bose who advocated total rejection of the caste system. Of course swami Vivekananda, Sharadhhanand and several others are mentioned with gratefulness for their message of equality and human dignity. This is quite in keeping with Ambedkar's broad mindedness, astute acumen and his capacity to enlist cooperation from

whichever source it came, since it was based on ideological conviction.

Details of Contents of Ambedkar's Marathi Writing

Material Based Particularly on the *Mooknayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat**

The religious struggle at Mahad and the responsibility of upper caste Hindus.

Upper caste Hindus are addressed to discard the traditional theory, ideology and practice of Varnashrama arrangement which was the root cause of all types of inequalities, inequities, injustice, and human degradation. It was the duty of every religion, and particularly the Hindu religion which claims itself to be superior to others and to evolve new patterns of behaviour, social relations, social interaction, etc. Ambedkar quotes Tilak for his favourable acceptance of the need for continuous evolving of such patterns by the Hindu religion—which would necessarily mean discarding the earlier patterns, which were inconsistent with new human values. Similarly, he refers to Shraddhanand and his efforts for the removal of inequality of the Hindu society, and of course to discard and eradicate untouchability. Ambedkar observes very regretfully that the philosophy and action programme advocated by Shraddhanand was both distorted and discarded in actual practice. That is why, it is very crucial to follow his prescriptions and advice, with all the energy and integrity at one's command, so that the Hindu society can acquire a modicum of solidarity. Dr. Ambedkar does not spare the non-Brahmins who took active part in rioting the untouchable satyagrahis in Mahad. He goes to the extent of pointing out that, in fact, under the garb of the Satyashodhak Samaj movement, the heinous act of terrorizing the minorities, both caste and religion, was

* In absence of authentic specificity of the material taken by the author either from *Mooknayak* or *Bahishkrit Bharat* and of specific period, the periods and pages have been deleted from the text—Dr. Ambedkar Chair Professor, J.N.U., New Delhi.

resorted to, which was extremely reprehensible. He gives the illustration of a Brahmin teacher who was protected by a Muslim being threatened and harassed by these elements. Such Hindus have no moral right whatsoever to speak of the glorious Hindu religion, leave aside to claim any pride for it.

The religious struggle of Mahad and the responsibility of the British Government.

Ambedkar has taken a very critical note of the fact of the neglect of its duty towards the untouchables by the British Government, though it had prepared legislation to improve their condition. He points out that for improving the present wretched condition of the untouchables, it is absolutely necessary to have access to all the public facilities such as roads, water (use), schools; places of worship should be freely available for the use of all the sections. He further states that access to such facilities is a matter and fact of common practice, which does not depend on granting of any special license or permission. Such usage undergoes a lapse from time to time and the lapse becomes a rule to justify itself. This however should never be allowed or tolerated, and every effort should be made to reinstate one's natural rights. It is, therefore, a very important duty of the Government to impartially legislate and ensure the execution of legislation to restore such rights. Pointing out the risk of rioting over disallowance of such right and practice, Dr. Ambedkar exhorts the Government to nip in bud any such eventuality by acting in time and good faith. Ambedkar further gives the example of untouchables who have been converted to Christianity and who enjoy their right of access to various public utilities; and he exclaims (with great regret) as to why it should not be extended to the untouchables who were Hindus. This is obviously due to neglect on the part of the Government which is at best connivance of the existing rules and regulations, if not collusion with the upper caste Hindu leaders and groups. For, ultimately, it is the implementation (of the rules and regulations) that matters. Otherwise, the duties of the Government officials to act as watchdogs would

be jeopardized, leading to the frustrations and sufferings of the affected sections namely the untouchables.

The religious struggle and the duties of the untouchables.

Both in its notion and practice, untouchability stems from the whims and caprices of the touchable castes and classes since they have taken a decision to propagate and implement untouchability in various ways. Temporary untouchability practised within a family unit in respect of purity and pollution during religious worship is also a figment of human imagination, which is sometimes ruthlessly imposed even on the children of the family. However, such untouchability is very temporary and, therefore, revocable. On the other hand, the permanent nature of the kind of untouchability imposed on certain section of the Hindu society is irrevocable and irreparable. This fact means the degrading status or position of the so-called untouchables. Therefore, it is extremely important and urgent to create public opinion among the caste Hindus to think seriously about the injustice, inhumanity and degradation inherent in such thought and practice.

In a way, the Varna theory provides a rationale, not to say legitimacy, for such water-tight divisions and the static nature of such arrangements. By educating public opinion, this sort of thinking can be questioned by appealing not only to reason but to human values. The upper castes claimed to be educated and education is supposed to be a leveller, instead of tolerating discrimination between people and people. Even purely from the point of view of rationality, keeping the untouchables away from education and knowledge would impair the efficiency of the Hindu social system and its economy, leave aside the humane dimension. It would be in the interest of the untouchables, particularly its leaders', to keep in touch with sensitive and sensible minds from the upper caste Hindus in particular to elicit and ensure their cooperation against the struggle for untouchability in any form whatsoever. On the one hand, Ambedkar advises the untouchables to appeal and make all such efforts to

change the psyche and practice of the upper caste Hindus; on the other hand, he advocates the use of positive resistance to the practice of untouchability by refusing to conform to traditional functions and duties assigned to them by the Hindu system. This is applicable both in the village economy as well as the urban economy. In this respect, he advocates his fellow-brethren to pursue the path of active resistance as recommended by Tilak. In fact, he quotes Bhagawat Gita favourably* in this respect, and states that injustice of any hue and form has no tradition or rather legitimacy in any religion. He would further like to remind his fellow-beings about their valour and significant contribution in war which has been duly acknowledged by the British rulers engraving their names on the victory column. Therefore, quite in keeping with the tradition of their valour and their capacity of successful fight, the untouchables should actively participate in this struggle without sparing themselves in any manner.

It is quite clear that Ambedkar has very clearly and astutely identified the various constituents, and as such has advocated the necessity of struggle for the untouchables to wrest their human rights so that they could live with dignity, respect and prosperity. The cultural, the economic and the political dimensions are clearly spelt out.

The Mahars and their Vatan (title to the land).

Vatan constitutes a traditional title and rights to land, which is an important ingredient of the 'Balute system' in Maharashtra. On the one hand, the Mahar Vatan signifies serving the government (administration) by performing various duties such as carrying message, collection of revenue, etc. In reality, the duty assigned by government to

* This is entirely the author's view, and the Dr. Ambedkar Chair in J.N.U. does not endorse this, at all, in absence of any reference to it in *Dr. Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches* published in English nor of that in specific period or date in Marathi—Dr. Ambedkar Chair, J.N.U., New Delhi.

the Mahars gets compounded as a result of their being asked, compelled to perform personal duty for the farmers and others, such as removal of the dead cattle. In fact, there is a very long list of duties entrusted to the Mahars in the village community. In reality, the Mahars are entitled to receive payment in cash for performing the duties entrusted to them by the government, which more often than not is not forthcoming. However, the promise of hereditary title to the land and getting benefits from the farmers in the villages has acted as a great incentive for the Mahars to remain bound to the land and refuse to migrate. There is a false sense of security engendered by the system of vatan. As a matter of fact, the Mahars are oblivious to the untold exploitation inherent in this system which can be rectified if only the Mahar Vatan was abolished, compelling the Mahar to leave the village—its economy and society. Without cash income, the feudal relationship will continue *sine die*. That is why, we suggest the abolition of Vatan. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur abolished Mahar Vatan which certainly benefited the Mahars. Pursuing the same logic, at a much later stage, it was suggested that the sense of having a stake in the village economy felt by the Mahar had to be undone by encouraging the process of large scale migration away from villages.

The economic basis of the progress of the untouchables.

Economic exploitation results in the destruction of self-respect which can be countered only by economic rejuvenation. This can be done only by creating sources of cash income. Producing Khadi would enable the untouchables to get income in cash. Moreover, by producing khadi, the problem of cladding themselves with adequate cloth can also be solved and this is particularly important in the case of female folk who, by custom, have been prevented from covering their bodies properly. That is why, the female folk were exhorted to dress themselves properly while attending any public meeting or function. In fact, the degraded position of untouchable female was a matter of special concern. One is reminded of the Scottish

enlightenment and its impact in improving the lot of the poor and agrarian sectors of society.

The Path of Satyagraha.

While appreciating the emotional appeal of certain motives in Hindu religion, Dr. Ambedkar is equally insistent on eradicating the basic evil of the Hindu social system, that is untouchability and caste discrimination. The idiom of Satyagraha has its historical roots embedded in Bhagavat Gita. Insistence on the pursuit of the right path has been extolled as a virtue and naturally enjoys legitimacy. Based on this argument, effort is made to educate public opinion amongst the untouchables, to explain the necessity of following such a course of action. In a sense, the linkage with tradition is established to provide a justification for the pursuit of such a course of action, both for untouchables themselves and for others. Resorting to Satyagraha is a moral duty and it has to be taken in this light by all the parties concerned. He quoted favourably a thought from Mahabharat "that alone is a man who gets enraged by injustice and who does not tolerate any kind of injustice."* Naturally, any attempt by the untouchables to follow the path of Satyagraha would be opposed by those who have perpetrated injustice and exploitation. However, such opposition has to be countered by relentlessly following the path of Satyagraha. Further, the path of Satyagraha should be non-violent.

The Mahad Satyagraha—the Presidential Speech, 25th December 1927.

The historical Satyagraha for staking a claim to use water of the Chavadar Lake in Mahad signifies Dr. Ambedkar's vision and insistence on launching as well as promoting the idea of inherent equality of human beings. In his speech, he refers to the poignant fact of the water of the lake concerned available

* Since the original Marathi text is not available at this stage, it cannot be ascertained whether Ambedkar had really quoted Mahabharat or developed upon Bhagavat Gita—Dr. Ambedkar Chair, J.N.U., New Delhi.

and accessible to people of different religions and sects. Not only that but the animals, including birds, had an easy access to its water. However, only the untouchables were denied the use of this water. Ambedkar's Satyagraha for demanding the right to the use of the water from this particular lake has to be taken in a deeper symbolic sense rather than the *prima facie* material sense. The intolerant attitude and action of the Hindus, legitimized by the Varna Dharma, came in for a frontal attack. The Satyagraha emphasized the simple fact, though not palatable to the caste Hindu society, that the untouchables were also human being and as such there was no justification for discriminating against them on any count. For Ambedkar, this meeting was the auspicious foundation of the struggle for equality.

Quite in keeping with his scholarship and deep knowledge of world history, he refers to the French Revolution, taken place in 1789, which challenged the tripartite system in French and in all the accidental societies. Naturally, Dr. Ambedkar does not fail to emphasize the fact that there were only three classes over there and the absence of the Shudras, leave aside the untouchables, is very significant. The French Revolution was actuated by lofty ideals such as the inherent equality of all human beings. It is and should be the ultimate goal of all political organizations and actions to guard this right. Naturally, any political system which wavers in this respect has to be changed not to say condemned. Entire citizenry alone can decide upon the rights of any section. No one has the authority to do so, meaning doing away with any kind of special rights of certain sections to define and delimit, restrict the rights of the common man. Rights of individuals should not be limited, except by law only so far to facilitate enjoyment of rights (given by birth) by everyone. Only that kind of action which is antithetical to the interests of the society should be banned. Every other type of action should be permissible to everyone. Law-making is not the prerogative of any class whatsoever. The law of protection and administration should be equally applied to all so as not to have any classes which are vulnerable to attack by anyone—not only from external

forces but more importantly from the internal sections. What is meant by this statement signifies the rooting out of atrocities and violence against a section of the people by those who have arrogated to themselves power (unbridled) in the name of rights inherent in the possession of properties, knowledge, etc. which reflects the linkage between knowledge, wealth and power.

Everyone is equally eligible for any honour and title, authority, occupation and education. Any differentiation on the basis of membership of a certain group should not be permissible but there can be differentiation between individuals on the basis of their merit. Therefore, the French illustration be kept in mind by the Hindu society to follow the path as stated and practised by progressive nations in order to develop and consolidate social and national organization.

Ambedkar very rightly warns his fellow-men about the danger of being complacent if the restrictions on commensality were to be removed, as propagated by those who were keen to establish solidarity amongst the Hindus by removing such restrictions. Therefore, gestures should not be mistaken for substantial action, which alone will be of help. Commensality and the facility for meeting together would not be enough since untouchability is a very complex phenomenon. It is necessary to totally discard the existing notions of the higher and the lower—the lowliest in this case. As a matter of fact, unless inter-marriages take place between the caste Hindus and the untouchables, the process of inter-mixing and assimilation would not have much meaning. At the same time, Ambedkar mentions that it would be unrealistic to expect that the Brahmins and the higher castes would initiate action in this matter. For the untouchables it is a matter of self-upliftment and development, while it would be in national interest. Discussion and rational argument is beset with serious limitations, and that is why there is the necessity of launching a struggle for the removal of untouchability, which is the epitome (of the worst kind) of inequality and discrimination. He also warns the higher castes that in the conduct of such

struggle (by the untouchables), it would be their responsibility to ensure that such struggle be carried out in a peaceful manner only. One of the most significant features of the Chavadar Satyagraha was Ambedkar's insistence on non-violence, which is symbolically reflected in his garlanding the photo of Mahatma Gandhi,* the supreme advocate of non-violence in India.

The Council of Ostracised in Kolaba District

The first of this conference was held at Mahad on 19th and 20th March 1927. The gathering comprised of about three thousand people. In his Presidential speech, Ambedkar made special mention of the glorious past of the Mahar community in particular. He ascribed the advancement and prosperity of the untouchables to formal education and jobs in the Army. As a result of enjoying status and position in the Army, even sepoys from Maratha caste would not hesitate to salute the Subedar from the Mahar community. This kind of status and authority was not enjoyed by any untouchable in any other part of the country, except in Konkan (region) in Maharashtra. The same community which enjoys such status and authority fell on evil days as a result of both the decline in education and deprivation from authority. Ambedkar further stated that the Brahmins had acquired hold through modern education and government jobs, in addition to their possession of farming of lands. No wonder that they would insist on the continuation of the Mahar Vatan, which not only meant participation of the Mahars in the village economy and society at the very lowest level but also perpetuation of their exploitation. That is exactly why, Ambedkar advocated that Mahar Vatan should be abolished in order to encourage, if not compel, Mahars to migrate to urban areas in search of secular jobs and, of course, to acquire modern education. This

* In absence of the original Marathi text at this stage, this also cannot be ascertained whether he, being the severest kind of critic of Mr. M.K. Gandhi, had really garlanded the photo of Mahatma Gandhi—Dr. Ambedkar Chair, J.N.U., New Delhi.

session was not only attended by persons from the high caste Hindus but they also chose to address the gathering. Quite in keeping with their effort to guard their interest, the high caste Hindus exhorted the untouchables to lift themselves up by their own efforts, instead of resorting to jealousy and hatred of higher castes.

The famous Mahad Satyagraha of Chavadar tank required considerable preparation for which various meetings were held not only in Bombay but in other towns of the Bombay province. In Bombay, in Chirabazaar, a mammoth meeting was held on 4th June 1927 which was attended by representatives from Kolhapur, Khandesh, Karwar, etc. The purpose of the meeting was to awaken the untouchables so as to persuade and prepare them to fight against the various kinds of injustice inherent in Hindu system. In Belgaum, a meeting was held under the presidentship of a headmaster. Similarly in Karwar, a meeting was held under the presidentship of one Mr. Nadkarni. Another meeting was held in Amaravati in a temple. Solapur also witnessed a meeting of untouchables on 11th July 1927.

In the various meetings which were held in Bombay, about one thousand Mahar Vatanars participated and expressed their support to the bill regarding the Mahar Vatanars proposed by Dr. Ambedkar in the Bombay State Assembly. Such support was forthcoming from the various meetings held in Kalyan, Dapoli, Raigad, Birwadi, etc.

Dharmashastra of the Hindus.

The ideas of purity and pollution, carried to an extreme, must have given rise to untouchability. This extreme ostracisation of a section of people, for no fault of theirs, certainly impaired social solidarity and destroyed the social fabric which, in its turn, invited foreign invasions, occupation and domination. While it is customary to blame the external and extraneous forces, this organic weakness of human society is neglected woefully. Therefore, unless steps are taken to rectify this organic weakness, the Hindu society can never be truly united.

Exclusion and woeful neglect, the lot of the underprivileged.

Discussing the educational status of the various groups in the Bombay province, certain facts come to one's notice. Brahmins who constitute a tiny minority, are the most advanced group educationally and also occupationally, not to say socially and politically (in terms of leadership). This brings out the central role of education as a key variable. In respect of higher education, the proportion of Brahmins and advanced castes was 100 for every two lakhs, Muslims 52, Maratha and comparable castes 14, untouchables and such sections 0. As a result of the special facilities offered to the Muslims, their proportion is much higher than that of other groups. While it is true that being deprived of food and other necessities is very bad, it is much worse to be deprived of knowledge. Knowledge and occupation are organically linked, which also ensures economic well-beings. That is why, the very sad plight of the untouchables in respect of education, and higher education in particular, is very frightening. Inevitably representation of the untouchables in various local governments, municipalities and so on gets adversely affected. There is no doubt that the government is entirely responsible for this state of affairs, namely the socio-economic and political degradation of the untouchables, for want of education. It would be futile to even think of any vestige of power (political) in the absence of education, and as such the existing degradation on every count is not rectified.

The farce of extrication of untouchability.

The concept of purity, or rather pollution, is to be found historically in other religions such as the Judaism. That does not justify branding a particular group as permanently polluted and justifying untouchability. Hindu religion, which talks of equality and love, does not seem to be bothered about this extraordinary phenomenon. Gautam Buddha tried to do away with this phenomenon to a certain extent but due to the decline, if not destruction, of Buddhism in India, such efforts came to standstill. Yet, Ramanand Acharya's preceptor was not a Brahmin and Ramanujam did his best to put a stop to the

practice of untouchability, without much success. The advent of British rule triggered the process of social reforms of which removal of untouchability certainly formed an important part. However, the priority given to political reforms meant neglecting this problem. As a reaction to Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha came into being. Even well-meaning and the rationally as well as socially sensitive Hindu personalities did not think it fit to address themselves to the removal of untouchability, a scourge of the Hindu society which militated against the Hindu unity. Even the Indian National Congress did not pay much attention to this important problem. The Hindu organization put forth a palliative of constructing a separate temple for the untouchables. This certainly testifies to the farcical approach of the Hindus to the removal of the problem of untouchability. Personally, I do not mind even if it takes some time for the 'Hindu mind' to be convinced about the necessity and the inherent morality in abjuring this atrocious phenomenon of untouchability and bide time to allow the untouchables' respectful entry in all the Hindu temples, which is extremely considerate and realistic of him.

There have been differences, not to say the cleavages, between the king and his subjects—the Pope and his lay people, the rich and the poor. However, this dichotomy will not enable us to appreciate the domination of the Brahmins which characterises the Hindu society in the name of religion. Ascription of status by birth, and the denial of facilities and opportunities to others—the largest majority of the people—has characterised the Hindu caste system. Of course, the plight of the untouchables is a special case of this status—ascriptive and total denial of any opportunity to rise. As a result of being deprived of any kind of knowledge, the perception of such people and groups gets extremely stunted, with the result that the existential order gets accepted and remains completely unquestioned and unchallenged.

It is true that the British rulers bled the country white, but the exploitation inherent in the caste system is much worse for the simple reason that (1) exploitation is not felt by those who are exploited, and (2) there is a legitimacy accorded to such

exploitation in the name of Hindu religion. No wonder that Brahmins as a whole were not impelled to participate in the non-Brahmin movement. Even more so, the domination of the communist leadership by the Brahmins led to the distortion of the principles of communism. If the Brahmins want to function as leaders of society, they must publicly put a stop to this notion and practice of hierarchy, unchanging and permanent. Then alone, it would be possible for them to lead society so as to guard the interests of all sections of the people.

Apprehension has been expressed even about the non-Brahmin movement in respect of unstinted support to the cause of the eradication of untouchability. However, it was gratifying that Mr. Jedhe and Javalkar, the proponents and acclaimed leaders of the non-Brahmin movement expressed their individual support to the Mahad Satyagraha. The non-Brahmins from Bombay promised to provide the required financial assistance to the Satyagraha, and those from Berar felt the urgency of such a course of action because the Dalit movement had already taken roots in Berar. We are convinced that intellectual and rational discourse would not help in talking this insuperable problem of untouchability and, therefore, take recourse of the path of Satyagraha. The condition stipulated by Jedhe and Javalkar regarding the exclusion of any Brahmin from this course of action is not acceptable to us because we are very clear in our mind that anyone, including the Brahmins, who rejects Brahmanism is acceptable to us. In fact, such a Brahmin is more acceptable to us than the non-Brahmins, afflicted by Brahmanism, who insist of exclusion. For us, any concept and practice of exclusion is abhorring; what matters is not caste by birth but conviction (intellectual and moral).

Various steps to be taken to rectify the injustice and exploitation imposed on the untouchables.

Writing extensively on the Mahar Vatan, Ambedkar has discussed threadbare the adverse consequences of the Mahar Vatan for the untouchables. He has cogently listed the various types of exploitation in this arrangement and most importantly

the feeling of complacency, which this arrangement has generated. The Mahar Vatan puts a permanent seal on exploitation and injustice because the Mahars would and actually are refused to quit this system, instead of moving out for seeking some improvement in their life chances. Responding to the criticism of his advocacy of the abolishing of the Mahar Vatan, Ambedkar assures the farmers that such abolition would not entail any special cost to them. In fact, there would be a relationship based on cash nexus which would relieve everyone of the relationship of compulsive type. However, the bill for abolishing the Mahar Vatan was turned down in the Assembly, not only with the support of the vested interests but also that of the Muslims. Ambedkar pleads for proper political awareness and consciousness on the part of the Mahars so that the interests of the untouchables can be safeguarded.

The system of Khoti as prevalent in some parts of Maharashtra is another instrument of exploitation and injustice and, as such, it has to be abolished. It is not only the untouchables who stand to suffer due to the system of Khoti, but, by and large, all the farmers and the tenants are the victims of this system. As a matter of fact, there are various restrictions on how to dress by the females belonging to the Kunbi caste, who are basically landless tenants and tillers of the soil, so that they cannot be properly dressed and their limbs covered adequately. Exposure of Kunbi women is a definite mark of degradation and stigma, leave aside women from the untouchable castes. In every possible way, the degradation of the poor and the untouchables spells unending exploitation and injustice which has to be stamped out.

It is plainly clear that the ignorant masses spell disaster to the society as a whole and that is why, free and compulsory primary education should be accepted by the Government as its own responsibility. One can appreciate how prophetic this statement, made in the 1920s, was for even the present wherein illiteracy has not been stamped out.

Political representation in self-government through local bodies, including the Bombay Municipal Corporation, should

be made available to the untouchables and to the other deprived sections so that their interests would be suitably represented.

While appreciating the importance of labour movement, Ambedkar is firmly against any hasty action which would spell disaster for the poor labourers and particularly for those belonging to the ranks of the untouchables, who have never been accepted as full-fledged members of labouring group by imposing various restrictions on their entry into certain work sections such as carding. Observance of untouchability thus even in textile mills speaks ill of labour movement. That is why, Ambedkar criticizes communist-led labour movement which advocates violent and quick revolution. He observes that the leaders may be communists but not the followers who have not abjured the traditional past differentiation, discrimination and social systems. No wonder that the communist movement, which neglects this poignant fact, would not really serve the interest of the labouring class as a whole. In fact, the communist movement is top heavy and neglects the base.

It is in this context that lip-service paid by the various caste Hindu groups and organizations for helping the untouchables, instead of removing untouchability completely, has invited stringent criticism. Without addressing oneself to the basic cause of injustice and exploitation, inherent in the traditional Hindu society, any type of patch-work would be of no avail. That is why, the concern shown by the Hindu organizations to prevent the untouchable sections from embracing any other religion such as Islam or Christianity is severely criticised.

What constitutes a revolution?

Countering the criticism that he was against the communist philosophy and movement, Ambedkar clarifies his position in this regard by delineating the fundamental character of revolution. For him, revolution is comprehensive and not limited to this political dimension. But it must have an economic and social component as well. The inter-linkage between the political, the economic and the social has been stressed by Ambedkar. For him, the social component

comprises of culture of which untouchables have been deprived. Resorting to violent action would not even fulfil the political goal, since what is needed is the change and transformation in social attitudes and practices which cannot be accomplished overnight by claiming to bring about a political revolution. According to Ambedkar, the concept of revolution is very comprehensive and fundamental, which must take care of every dimension such as the political, the economic and the socio-cultural. Moreover, the advocacy of revolution by limiting oneself to the Russian example is felt to be both inadequate and inadvisable by Ambedkar.

That is why, Ambedkar cannot see eye to eye with the Indian communists' insistence of following the Russian example. He ridicules the offer of Presidentship of the Hindu Mahasabha made to him. Likewise, temple entry is no solution to the basic injustice inherent in the name of religion which justifies equality. The hollowness of the claims made by the Hindu organizations became clear in the violent reaction to the Mahad Satyagraha as well as the Parvati Satyagraha. He exhorts his fellow-men not to fall prey to the machinations of some of these leaders of the Hindu organizations. In this context, Ambedkar quotes the names of Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekanand, Swami Ramatirtha, Ranade, Bhandarkar, Rajaram Shastri Bhagwat, R. Raghunath Rao who had categorically pointed the artificial and unjust nature of the caste system as a whole of which untouchability was one of the worst features.

The stalwarts mentioned above had clearly appreciated the impediments in progress caused by adherence to the caste system and, therefore, advocated its eradication, lock, stock and barrel. Then alone the differences between the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the untouchables can be eliminated. This would mean a significant departure from the present practice of allocation of tasks and the resulting differences in education, occupation, status and power on the basis of the traditional system. By eliminating the caste system, allocation of tasks—and the accompanying consequences—will be

entirely guided by individual's aptitude, competence and affording scope to every individual for his progress and development. This will also ensure social efficiency and goodwill, never experienced before. Ambedkar refers to the various tasks such as education and the importance of moulding personality so as to be consistent with the basic value of social transformation, scientific research, literary studies, the task of protection, social service, creation of wealth and its equitable distribution, etc. which can be and would be efficiently undertaken, if only the existing restrictions (artificial and unjust) were removed.

A plea for a proper dialogue between the untouchables and the high caste Hindus in particular.

Instead of being overconcerned with transcendental values, it would be much more meaningful to be occupied with secular problems, which afflict the Hindu society and the Indian society in general, as a result of keeping out a large section of humanity. It is the duty of any thinking person to pay attention to the existential reality which is steeped in exploitation and injustice. Any type of exploitation and injustice affects adversely, not only those who are the victims but also those who are perpetrators of such phenomena. That is why, it becomes a moot problem to question the benefits of remaining in the Hindu fold. There has been hardly any point of proper understanding and appreciation between the caste Hindus and the untouchables, who have been kept out of the fold—mainstream. While conceding that the British rulers also had not done much for the untouchables, the total lack of sensitivity on the part of the high caste Hindus is criticised squarely. The only way out of this impasse is self-reliance and self-respect to be acquired through modern education and occupations, and political representation which would provide a sense of power.

Contribution of some caste Hindus

Involvement and contribution of some caste Hindus to this whole exercise of depicting, analysing and suggesting measures for the upliftment of the ostracized Bharat, that is the untouchables, initiated by Dr. Ambedkar.

Mr. D.V. Pradhan wrote 'A Critique of Varnashram' in the *Bahishkrit Bharat* (31st May 1929, p. 282; 21st June 1929, p. 292; 12th July 1929, p. 302; 16th August 1929, pp. 204-205). It has been very correctly stressed by Mr. Pradhan that if the foundation of a social system is not strong enough, it starts declining and may be destroyed over a period of time. The growth and development of society and the effective organization to ensure this should be the major goal of any social system. However, particularly as for the Hindu society, importance of religion, to the neglect of other vital features, was perceived so as to promote spiritual development. All the same, it would be counter-productive to neglect the secular dimension of society and unduly emphasize religion.

Because of the Brahmanical domination, interaction and cooperation between different constituents of society got vitiated. This naturally impaired efficiency of society. In the wake of deterioration of efficiency and solidarity, the Hindu society became vulnerable to external invasions and attacks.

Mr. N.S. Mundle in his article 'Origin Of Untouchability And Obligation Of Hindu Society' (*Bahishkrit Bharat*, 1st July 1927, pp. 83-86), reminds that in social psychology there is a theorem that the underdogs tend to fight amongst themselves rather than challenge the supreme authority, power, domination of the upper classes. While it is easier to say so, one has to enquire into the genesis of the mental framework because of which oppression is accepted as a part of reality—Durkheim's social fact—which is given and cannot be changed. This is rendered possible because of the foisting of unpleasant and polluting functions on the untouchables by the high caste Hindus, which was compounded by providing an ideational and ideological justification. Then again, the prohibition of access to knowledge, particularly the traditional and also the secular, prevented the untouchables from (a) knowledge about the existential reality and its causes, and (b) a kind of incapacity, disability and inefficiency permanently stamped on them. It was argued by the vested interests that the social order—occupational, economic, and status and power—was ordained by God and it was infallible as well as unchangeable.

In his contribution entitled 'Pragmatic Religion for the Reformed Followers of the Vedic Arya Dharma' (*Bahishkrit Bharat*, 1st July 1927, pp. 56-58), MR. N.R. Sahastrabudhe reaffirms that the Shastras do not accept the dichotomous division of the touchables and the untouchables. This artificially created dichotomy has to be removed in the interest of not only the untouchables but also that of the Hindu society. He gives copious examples of how untouchable castes were entrusted with important functions such as the upkeep of horses to be used for warfare.

Mr. V.R. Shinde also wrote a series of articles on the phenomenon of untouchability in Burma and compared it with that in India. He wrote even on the Namashudras in Bengal who were able to overcome the limitations imposed by untouchability through self-effort and modern education.

Mr. G.H. Deshmukh—popularly known as Lokahitavadi in his trenchant critique and observation, attributes the plight of the untouchables in particular to the machinations of the priestly (Brahmin) class. He castigates the Brahmins for neglecting the pursuit of knowledge and education and selfless service to society. Relatively uneducated Brahmins took to the priestly functions to take money without much effort. This could be done by enthralling the ignorant masses in superstitions so that they would fall a prey to the demands of the priestly class for giving them (the latter) various kinds of *Dan* (compulsory fees for performing certain rituals in a mombo jumbo fashion). If the priests themselves were uneducated or at least half-educated, they had to take recourse to deceit and fraud in order to extract money from the ignorant (*Bahishkrit Bharat*, 15th March 1929, pp. 247-248).

Several others like Mr. B. S. Raravikar, a Brahmin from Akola, in his response to discussion carried out in *the Bahishkrit Bharat*, squarely condemned the phenomenon of untouchability as the major cause of ignorance, poverty and deprivations of such classes.

Problems, Thoughts and Objectives

Current problems and occasional thoughts—their relevance to the basic objectives of the action programme.

Ambedkar furnished figures about education in Bombay Province, which clearly point out the monopoly by higher castes and the denial of the untouchables in particular.

Referring to the students in Training College, which trains its students to occupy teaching positions, the caste-wise position of such students is furnished for the eastern, central and southern parts of the Province as follows: Eastern part-123 Brahmins and similar castes, 142 Maratha and similar castes, 7 untouchable and similar castes; Central region-219 Brahmins and similar castes, 293 Maratha and similar castes, 35 untouchable and similar castes; Southern region-9 Brahmins and similar castes, 31 Maratha and similar castes, 4 untouchable and similar castes. Obviously, these figures pertaining to caste-wise representation are in inverse proportion to size of the population.

Further an incident, which took place in a training college, is reported where the duplicity of non-Brahmin students in respect of their attitudes towards untouchable students trainees is exposed; for instance, the fact that they refused to inter-dine with the latter. The judgement of Madras High Court ascertaining the right of everyone, irrespective of caste or religion, to free access to public utilities is also reported, and the same treatment is demanded in Bombay Province and also the rest of India.

The advice given by F. K. Nariman and Subhash Chandra Bose to youth organisations is very important, since both of them want such organizations not to limit their activity to debates and discussions which would only turn them into academic fora. But a concrete programme of action involving the lowest constituents in society is needed so as to shake off the internal dissensions and ruptures to be able to provide a united front for political action—attainment of political independence.

The instance of a Prince from South India is quoted favourably, because he was able to contain the scourge of untouchability in his state. In fact, he is compared with Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj who made similar attempts.

Instances have been quoted of common Satya Narayan Puja in Konkan, where the higher castes and untouchables participated freely. Similar instances of inter-dining have been

quoted to point out the intellectual and ideological shift in the mental makeup of some higher caste individuals. That is what Ambedkar was very keen to enlist the cooperation from a quarter whatsoever. Some Brahmin advocates had written to Ambedkar, expressing their desire to be his disciples and followers. They were keen to participate in his activity.

Exchange of Ideas—Comparing Notes

Several persons responded to ideas propagated by Dr. Ambedkar. Thus, it has been emphasized that it was extremely important for the untouchables, that is the ostracized group, caste and class, to organise themselves and launch a movement because the caste Hindus would never allow them to get anywhere near them. Thus, retaining of distinct identity was advocated (*Bahishkrit Bharat*, 3rd April 1927, p. 1).

The fact of connivance on the part of British officers with the Brahmins and other upper castes, particularly their henchmen, in villages in respect of atrocities perpetrated against untouchables had been widely criticized by several pleaders.

The hypocritical nature of the efforts of some Hindu organizations in promoting interdining and temple entry has also come in for criticism. The fact of the genuine welcome and appreciation expressed by some Brahmin editors has also been noted with approval. Any instance of liberal thinking and broad mindedness has not escaped; for example Mr. Gokhale's insistence on primary education for all, Mr. Ranade's liberalism and his advice to the high caste Hindus to shun the practice of untouchability, etc. Mr. B. G. Tilak's advice to young students in respect of breaking the shackles of caste distinctions, and to adopt a new value system and patterns of behaviour has also been noted.

Of course, this publication provided opportunity for its readers from all the sections and strata of society to respond to the contents of the journals, and encourage them to contribute effectively by their feed-back. As a matter of fact such feed-back clearly indicates the signal contribution of the journals and particularly the valiant efforts of Ambedkar to reach the people and educate public opinion.

Brief Summary

Some theoretical problems arising out of the study of Ambedkar's writing in *Bahishkrit Bharat* and *Mooknayak*.

A question may be raised as to why the content of the presentation is limited to the journals mentioned above, to which the simple reply is that quite in keeping with the tradition of the earlier dalit literature, Ambedkar wanted to approach the masses and others in their mother tongue so as to reach them effectively. Secondly, his writings reflect the formative period of Ambedkar's public career which was to blossom into a national leadership in course of time. Of course, he has written copiously in English language which is readily available to everyone who can read English. However, his important writings and reflections are encapsulated in his writings in Marathi, mentioned above. The torch of dalit literature was carried forward and considerably brightened, by his writings, in Western Maharashtra, Marathwada, Konkan, Mumbai, etc. His writings paved the way for his acquiring national stature, if not international. Moreover, his scholarship abroad prepared him eminently to take up the task of public-social education in the most proper sense of the term. Therefore, having initiated this process he could naturally address himself to a much wider audience by his writings in English in course of time. Further, his writings reflect his engagement with national parties like the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League and last but not the least the British rulers. As a matter of fact, Ambedkar has nearly pinned down the above mentioned organisations for both the perpetration and perpetuation of the evils imposed on the untouchables in particular and on the deprived and disprivileged sections of society in general. It is quite in keeping with his concern for the latter that he thought it fit to start an organization for the labourers on an all India basis. I am specially making a mention of this aspect of his contribution to dispel the sterile controversies about his stature.

As for the theoretical issues arising out of his writings, one

could mention some important issues such as the following. About the disjunction between cognitive systems and social frameworks and, of course, the danger of accepting a unitary ideology by intellectuals in particular, it is quite clear from his reflections that the entire process of structuralist deconstruction and reconstruction is perennial and needs constant attention from the discerning minds. Particularly for the exploited sections are concerned, it is very urgent to carry on deconstruction in order to reconstruct. Without resorting to this activity, the passive citizenry will continue to put up with injustice. Democracy in order to be meaningful must have a substantive content and modalities instead of a formal structure, which is more often than not, one finds electioneering. No wonder that Ambedkar was opposed to the formal process of democracy and was very apprehensive about the coercive rule of the majority. That is why, though sounding paradoxical, revolutionary change must be the motive force of democracy. Intellectuals particularly the progressive middle classes must align themselves with the working classes in order to make the experiment of democracy a functioning reality. Newly emerging sources of power need to be counteracted from time and again. Only the establishment of a civil society, which is an agreed upon order giving choice and freedom to everyone, would ensure the much desired and desirable change. Humanism, realism and vitalism should be the key messages. The continuum between contestation, confrontation and conflict also needs to be carefully examined in the light of Ambedkar's contribution. Ambedkar deliberately desisted from conflict and has written a large in his advocacy of non-violent means.

Some of these problems, if not taken proper cognizance of and acted upon in time, would perpetuate the rhetoric and inaction in respect of the ideals which are paraded from the house tops.

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