

---

## CHAPTER - III

### **Social Evils centered around *Varṇāshrama Dharma***

In the Annihilation of caste, I think, all the criticisms of Ambedkar against caste system are nothing but the criticism against the *Varṇa Vyavasthā* in Hinduism. And he beautifully shows that all the social problems have come from this *Varṇa* system. But on the other side, we can see that the supporters of *Varṇa Vyavasthā* mainly Gandhiji claims that the problems are coming from caste system, but not from *Varṇa-Vyavasthā*. Ambedkar observes that *Varṇa-Vyavasthā* gives birth to caste system. But Gandhiji claims that *Varṇa-Vyavasthā* has nothing to do with caste. Caste according to him is a custom whose origin he does not know and does not need to know for the satisfaction of his spiritual hunger. The law of *Varṇa* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. According to Gandhiji, in *Varṇa* system there is calling too low and none too high, all are good, lawful absolutely equal in status. So, all the social problems in our society like untouchability, exploitation etc. comes from caste system which is based on birth but not from the *Varṇa-Vyavasthā* which is based on *guṇa* and *karma*.

On the basis of above discussion one may easily conclude that the concept of Ambedkar about *varṇa-vyavasthā* is something wrong. So, Ambedkar's objection against *Varṇa -Vyavasthā* is not justified. But I think that Ambedkar does not commit any mistake here. He rightly observes though caste and *Varṇa* are different so far as their definitions are concerned but they are not different at all so far as their practice in our society is concerned.

Now I would like to mention the following objections against caste or *Varṇa* system which is raised by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar one by one.

- 
1. In “*Annihilation of Caste*” Ambedkar says that caste is the monster that crosses the path of political and economic reform in India. Because, our society is not a free society. Here all the people are divided into four classes. As a result people belonging to higher caste or *Varṇa* enjoy some vested interest; consequently they are not interested in belong any reform in society.
  2. Ambedkar says that even today there are some persons who support caste system. The supporters of caste system argue that there is nothing wrong with the caste system because it is not the division of laborer but the division of labor which is supported by any society. But Ambedkar says that the caste system is not merely the division of labor, it is also the division of laborers. According to him, this division of labor again is not spontaneous because it is not based on the natural aptitudes. He says that an individual should choose and make his own career on the basis of his original capacities. But the caste system is not maintained these principles.
  3. Some Biological defenders are of the view that caste is to preserve the purity of blood and race. But Ambedkar also rejects this argument. He thinks that in this field the observation of anthropologists is wrong to note. But they are saying that there is race and blood which pure.
  4. Some supporters of the *Cāturvarṇa* known as Arjya Samajists are to take his place in Hindu Society according to his worth. They suggest that all problems are the problems of caste, but not of *Varṇa*. So caste should be annihilated not the *Varṇa*. Four thousands of caste should be replaced only by four varnas – Brahman, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Śūdra*. But Ambedkar says why the Arjya Samajists insists upon labeling men as *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Śūdra*. A learned person would be honored without his being labeled a Brahmin. A soldier would be

---

respected without his being designated a *Kshatriya*. If European society honors its soldiers and servants without giving them permanent labels. It should also equally be maintained in Hindu society. So the question is that why Hindu society do not maintain this? The supporters of *Cāturvarṇa* do not consider this.

5. Caste system is derogatory for our society because it is demoralized the whole Hindu society. It has been spoiled the public spirit and destroyed the sense of public charity. An individual's responsibility is only to his caste. This virtue has become caste ridden and morality has become caste bound. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. All this matter is created the problem and this problem is highly affected to our society.
6. According to Ambedkar, caste prevents Hindus from forming a real society or nation. In fact, the name Hindu is itself a foreign name. It was given by the Mohamedans. It does not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mohammedans invention. The people of caste system had no any concept of their having constituted a community and have no feeling of other caste. Here Ambedkar mentioned that why the Hindus are coward but Muslims and Sikh are brave? It is not due to their physical weakness. It is due to the lack of organization or feeling of unity. A Sikh thinks that he may be one but he is not alone. The same thing can be said in the caste of Muslims. But a Hindu knows that he was one and alone because, if a Hindu was in danger then no Hindu will come to save him but in the caste of Sikh and Muslims, another person of their community must be come to save them. So, that is why Ambedkar told that caste in Hinduism is dangerous for forming a real society or nation.

- 
7. Ambedkar also observed that an anti-social spirit is the worst features of caste system in Hinduism. This anti-social spirit is not confined to caste alone. It has gone deeper and has poisoned the mutual relations of the sub castes as well.
  8. Ambedkar opines that in unifying society or nation caste prevents a bar. Caste has not been proved fruitful for the race rather it has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus. It must be taken into consideration that the Hindus which is the assimilation of different caste and whose name had been given by the Mohamadans had no earlier extinction of a federation and surprisingly there feeling of unification is roused whenever there is a Hindu Muslim riot.

He also thinks that the Hindus which is an aware of consciousness of forming nation by inter-caste marriages live with the pre-conception of residing within the territory of same caste. Moreover, the caste system among different Hindu section compel them to live within the periphery of beliefs, customs and thoughts and therefore they never share the emotions that is cultivated by participating in common activity of different castes of Hindus that ultimately led them to form a perfect society or nation by itself.

9. According to Ambedkar, one of the most distinguishing curses of caste system of Hinduism is keeping adherence towards different sub-castes of one own main caste. That is how the Brahmins want to protect their own caste interest forgetting the respect to other Hindu caste and vice versa. In this way an anti-social mood is roused in following strict conviction and deep-rooted culture. This is not only applicable in the case of present day example but this is heralded down the generations since no caste wants to forget the infamy caste upon their forefathers by the forefathers of the others.

---

10. Ambedkar also feels that one of the darkest aspects of the caste system prevailing in Hinduism has led them to keep the down-trodden classes of Hindus in the everlasting dungeon of darkness. The upper class of the Hindu society have put a stigma on the aboriginal tribes and have never felt the need of modifying or civilizing even the Hindu Vedic Scriptures, citing from the epic Mahabharata shows that Dronacharya, the royal preceptor to the Kouravas, Pandavas and incarnation of Brahma refused to accept Eklavya only on the pretext that he belonged to the Nishadha, a confederation of jungle tribes of ancient India. Though we have seen the Muslims and Christians have been deliberately trying to modify and uplift their low-caste through fear and kindness. It is to be noted that this so-called savage classes of the Hindus if pampered and converted to other religion would turn into the enemy of his own race. So, this is the worst curse of the caste system in Hinduism.

11. Ambedkar has also established that the upper classes of the Hindu society have been deliberately pushing forward the people belonging to lower class to rise their status and be as per with the upper class. He also exemplified that two so-called lower class in Maharashtra namely the Sonars and the Pathare Prabhus who had desired to raise their social status by following the habits and ways of the Brahmins were scorned by the contemporary masters of Brahmins class who by means of their diplomacy over the *Pashwas* had prevented the *Sonars* or *Pathare Prabhus* to gain their social importance whether by means of wearing "Dhotis" in Brahmin style or by denouncing the widow-remarriage. In this regard Ambedkar held the opinion if the *Mohamadans* has been cruel in uplifting their down-trodden by means of sword to follow one culture and one way of living or the

---

Christians whose goal is to spread one culture even by conversion; the Hindu has been mean and cruel because they have been trampling over their fraternity.

12. It has been a controversial question whether Hindu religion has been missionary.

Dr. Ambedkar held the view that definitely the Hindu religion had been missionary before the caste system grew up converting a people from other religion his placement in particular caste is a matter in question since no caste in Hindu religion allows people belonging to other caste to make an admission into his own caste. He further viewed that so long the caste system prevails people will fail to accept new one in his caste and therefore Hindu religion cannot be turn into a missionary religion. Thus he nullified the claim of the supporters of *Cāturvarṇa* that the upliftment of *Varṇa* could accomplished by worth since it is predefined by birth. In this regard Ambedkar objected that Hindu is not at all a missionary one.

13. Ambedkar showed that the existence of caste system in Hinduism has made an individual Hindu to feel miserable or unprotected since the barrier of caste system has made him feel helpless whenever he is in danger his entire community will extend their full support and protection. Therefore, the caste barrier has made a Hindu divided of mutual help, trust and fellow-feeling. Moreover, a Hindu is also weak because he lacks the moral strength to oppose and also remains indifferent to oppose.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, a renounced social reformer and the father of Indian constitution, who sacrificed his whole life to ensure the wellbeing of the whole society in general and the downtrodden people in particular. Ambedkar was invited by the Jat-Pal-Todak Mandal, an organization of caste Hindu social reformers of Panjab to preside over its Annual Conference which was to be held at Lahore, the headquarters of the Mandal, in 1936. It is important to

---

note that the one and the only aim of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, as it is understood by Ambedkar, was to annihilate the Caste System from amongst the Hindus. Ambedkar prepared a long, informative scholarly and thought provoking presidential address. The members of the reception committee of the Mandal went through the speech and came to the conclusion that though the speech as a whole is worthy of being highly certified but some of the passages are detrimental to the purpose of the Mandal. So, Har Bhagwan, on behalf of the Mandal, requested Ambedkar to drop those passages from the speech he prepared to deliver from the presidential chair. But Ambedkar declined to drop even the comma and the semi colon from his speech. As a result the conference was declared postponed since die. Ambedkar thought that owing to the cancellation of the conference people were deprived of the opportunity to know the views of him on the problems imposed by the Caste System in our society. Long before the cancellation of the conference the presidential address prepared by Ambedkar had been printed and the copies of the same were lying on his hand. Therefore, Ambedkar decided to put the printed copies in the market so that people can avail the opportunity to know his views. Like many others Mahatma Gandhi himself also went through the printed presidential address prepared by Ambedkar and came to know the following important views of Ambedkar :-

Firstly, Ambedkar observed that most of the problems our society suffers from like untouchability, starvation, disintegrity, degradation of morality, oppression etc. are nothing but the corollary of the caste system. This caste system, in turn, is the result of the Varṇa Vyavasthā. Varṇa Vyavasthā is directly sanctioned by Hindu Scriptures. So, it can be said that caste system too is indirectly sanctioned by the Hindu Scriptures. As the caste system has ultimately been sanctioned by the Hindu Śāstras, it cannot be eradicated without discarding the authority of the Hindu Śāstras. In this context it is worthy to note that according to

---

Ambedkar, untouchability also cannot be brushed away without denying the authority of the same as it is an unavoidable corollary of the caste system. Ambedkar held that the Hindus observe caste and untouchability not because they are inhuman but because they are deeply religious. Inhuman behavior of the Hindus are the result of their firm faith inculcated upon their minds by the *Śāstras* so they will change their attitude and conduct when they will cease to believe in the authority and sanctity of the *Śāstras*. In this context Ambedkar very beautifully says, “Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the *Śāstras*, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so”<sup>ix</sup>. So, Ambedkar thought that in observing caste and untouchability the Hindus are not wrong, what is really wrong is nothing but the Hindu religion itself, which is the root cause of all the major problems of Hindu society. So, our society can be made cure from the disease only through the destruction of the faith of the people upon the sanctity and authority of the *Śāstras*.

After reading the presidential address prepared by Ambedkar Gandhiji had a close examination of the same and came to the conclusion that each and every reformer needs to go through his address to be benefited. But at the same time he also printed-out that it is important to go through his address not because it is not open to objection, but simply because it is open to serious objection. Gandhiji nicely presented the objections in the following way:

First, Gandhiji said that the texts which Ambedkar quotes to stand his own position mentioned in his address are not authentic and original. So, his position cannot be accepted to be true.

Secondly, to realize the spirit of Hindu religion as well as to understand the actual import of it what is necessary is to interpret its *Śāstras* accurately. But Gandhiji says that the



---

learned persons are not the right persons to interpret the Śāstras, the right persons to interpret them are only the Saints and Sages. So far as the interpretation and understanding of the Saints and Sages go there is no room for caste and untouchability in Hinduism. Ambedkar is a learned person no doubt, but he is not a Saint. Consequently, his interpretation and understanding of the Hindu Sastras cannot be proper. Gandhiji himself observed that infact Hindu religion has nothing to do with the caste and untouchability. Caste, Gandhiji said, is nothing but a custom, but he frankly admitted that he is fully ignorant of its origin. Gandhiji further pointed out that our religion has the room for *Varṇas* and *Āśramas* but they have nothing to do with the caste and untouchability. There is nothing wrong in the *varṇas* and the *Āśramas* which are sanctioned by religion. The law of *Varṇa* says nothing about our rights, it says only about our duties. It prescribes our professions and nothing else. It advises us to follow the callings of our ancestors for our livelihood which is conducive for ensuring the wellbeing of our society. All the callings are equal in status; none of them is superior or inferior. Due performance of them carries same merit before God. So to ascribe superiority or inferiority to any one of them is to violate the very law of *Varṇas*. Likewise, in *Varna* there is no place for untouchability as well.

I cannot agree with Gandhiji so far as his second objection is concerned. This fact cannot be denied that there are some elements (layers) in religion which lie beyond the reach of our intelligence. But this does not mean that no element in religion can be understood through intelligence. I think whether caste system and untouchability follow from Hindu Religion can very well be understood through intelligence. Well educated persons like Ambedkar are intelligent enough. So, this is not that an educated person is not a right person to understand whether caste system and untouchability follow from Hindu Religion.

---

In the third argument Gandhiji pointed out that Ambedkar judged Hindu Religion in the light of its worst specimens but not by its best ones. But it is not the proper way to understand any religion. Religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. If Hindu religion is judged in the light of the religion professed by Chaitannya, Tukaram, Ramkrishna, Ram Mohan Roy, Debendra Nath Tagore, Vivekananda and so on, the so called good specimens only then the actual spirit of it can be understood. In this case no one can deny the merit of Hindu Religion.

Ambedkar has beautifully countered each and every aforesaid objection raised by Gandhiji against him. He categorically said that any reader of his speech would understand that Mahatma has entirely missed the issues raised by him. Ambedkar further mentioned that Gandhiji has raised some false allegations which are not issues that actually arise out of what he liked to call his indictment of the Hindus. So, the questions put forth by Gandhiji are fully beside the point and the main argument of the speech was lost upon him.

In order to counter the first argument raised against him Ambedkar frankly admitted that he is not the right person to determine which Śāstras are actually authentic and original and which are not but all the Śāstras or the texts cited by him are in fact, taken from the writings of Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak. No one will deny the authority of him on the Sanskrit language and on the Hindu Śāstras. So, this objection virtually does not stand as because the originality and the authority of the texts cited by Ambedkar have been recognized by Tilak. Even if somebody continues to insist that this objection is valid then the objection actually goes against Tilak but not against Ambedkar.

The reply given by Ambedkar to the first objection, I think, is well grounded. If the books which have been cited by Ambedkar to be authentic are taken from the list made by Bal Gangadhar Tilak then the responsibility is of Tilak, not of Ambedkar.

---

In reply to the second objection Dr. Ambedkar said that according to the Mahatma only the saints and the sages are the right persons to interpret Hindu Śāstras and as far as the interpretations of them are concerned there is neither the place of caste system nor the place of untouchability in Hinduism. Here, Ambedkar said that if what the Mahatma observes is true then the saints should have raised their voice against the caste and untouchability prevailing in our society. But no saint has ever been seen to do so. Moreover, they themselves are the staunch believer in the systems of caste and untouchability. Most of the saints used to live and died as members of caste. Ambedkar cited a classic example of Jnyandeo, one of the best specimens of the Hindu religion mentioned by Gandhiji, who was so passionately attached to his status as a Brahmin that when the Brahmins of Paithan would deny him to their fold he moved heaven and earth to establish his status. Here one may cite the case of saint Eknath as an example which goes against the view of Ambedkar. Eknath used to touch the untouchables and dine with them. So, what is claimed by Ambedkar that none of the saints is seen to touch the untouchables cannot be accepted. But in response to this objection Ambedkar said that saint Eknath did so not because he did not support the system of caste and untouchability but because he wanted to show the magic power of the holy river Ganges. He did believe that through the touch of the untouchables one positively be polluted. But that pollution could be washed away by a bath in the sacred river Ganges. Ambedkar further said that even if the saints would have been seen to break the caste system it would not have affect upon the life of the common people, because it is taught that saints should not be followed by common people. It is taught that a saint might break caste but the common people are strictly prohibited to do the same. On the basis of the discussion so far it can be said that it is nothing but a false consolation that there were saints who understands or interprets *śāstras* differently from the learned few or ignorant many.

---

So far as the reply to the second objection is concerned I partially agree and partially disagree with Ambedkar. In his second reply, Ambedkar said that if, as a matter of fact, caste and untouchability do not follow from Hindu religion and it is truly understood by the saints then they should have raised their voice against the caste and untouchability which gives birth to so many problems in our society. I fully agree with Ambedkar on this point. But I am in doubt about how much Ambedkar's claim that the saints themselves follow the caste system is justified. Dr. Ambedkar, in order to substantiate his own position, cited a classic example of Jnyandeyo who was passionately attached to his status as a Brahmin. But so far as my understanding goes Brahmin is one of the *Varṇas*, not a caste. Chatterjee, Mukharjee, Banerjee and so on are the instances of caste. So, Jyandeyo claimed for *Varṇas* not for caste. Beside this the objection of Ambedkar that all the saints themselves follow the caste system in their own life cannot be accepted. At least some of the saints like Ramkrishna Dev, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Chaitannya Dev and some other did not follow the same in their own lives. Moreover, they raised objections against the caste system prevailing in our society. So, at least this objection of Ambedkar is not true.

In order to counter the third objection mentioned above Ambedkar said that he himself agreed with every word of the statement that a religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. But he pointed out that this did not dispose of the matter. Here the question comes – why are the numbers of worst specimen so many and the number of the best specimen so few? Ambedkar himself assumed two probable alternative answers to this question. The first answer is that the worst ones by the very nature are so perverse that they are not worthy of being morally educated. And the second answer is that the religious ideal is absolutely wrong which has given a wrong moral twist to the masses and in inspite of the wrong ideal the best have become the best just by giving the wrong twist

---

a turn to the right direction. According to Ambedkar, the second answer is the only logical and reasonable answer. In that case the Mahatma's argument that a religion should be judged in the light of its best specimens shows us no solution to the objection raised by Ambedkar.

In the next step Ambedkar showed that Gandhiji himself did not follow in his life what he preaches. He said that the Mahatma was a Bania by birth. So his calling is trading. But neither his ancestors nor he himself even touched trading to earn their bread. The forefathers of the Mahatma took ministership as their profession which is a calling meant for the Brahmins. Gandhiji before becoming a Mahatma took law as his calling. Subsequently, abandoning law he became half saint and half politician. The sons of the Mahatma too did not resort to trading for their livelihood. Ambedkar said of the youngest son of the Mahatma who was a faithful follower of him. He born as a *Vaishya*, got married a Brahmin daughter and took a profession of newspaper magnate. Most surprisingly the Mahatma, Ambedkar said, is not known to have raised any objection against his son for this. This clearly implies that in the name of *Varṇa Vyavasthā* Gandhiji deceived common people. Besides this, Ambedkar pointed out another logical consequence of this theory which is morally indefensible. According to this doctrine one must pursue the calling of his forefather. If so, the one must continue to be a pimp, if his grandfather was a pimp, likewise a woman must continue to be a prostitute because her grandmother was a prostitute. Is it not a morally indispensable position?

I think the observation made by Ambedkar here is appropriate. As long as the proverb, "*Apani ācāri dharma apare sekhāo*"<sup>xix</sup> – is concerned Gandhiji's teaching to follow *Varṇaśrama* dharma has lost its moral strength.

The real Brahmins who are living on alms freely given to them, who are otherwise called hereditary Brahmin priest, according to Mahatma, are carrier of the spiritual treasures.

---

But Ambedkar drew our attention to the dark side of the hereditary Brāhmin Priest will be separate word. He says that a Brahmin can be a priest to Visnu, to Sankara, to Buddha, to Kali, who are the God of love, the God of destruction, the greatest teacher of mankind, teaching the noblest doctrine of love, the Goddess having regular sacrifice of an animal to satisfy her thirst for blood respectively. Likewise, he can be a priest to so many Gods and Goddesses having antagonistic attributes. No honest man can be a devotee to all of them. But here it is said that this is due to the catholicity and spirit of toleration, the greatest virtue of Hindu religion that one Brahmin can be a priest of so many Gods and Goddesses having opposite characters. But Ambedkar sharply reacted to this reply and said that toleration here is nothing but another name for insincerity. In that case a person must be deemed to be bankrupt of all spiritual treasures. A person pursue such a calling simply because it is ancestral, and for nothing else. One cannot have any love and faith upon such a calling. It is nothing but a mechanical process handed down from father to son barring conservation of virtue.

Ambedkar said that there was a time when the Mahatma was a full-blooded and blue-blooded Sanatani Hindu and a blind supporter of caste system. He defended it with the vigor of the orthodox and strongly opposed the inter-dining, inter-drinking and inter-marrying. He had a firm conviction that restraint about inter-dinning etc. helps a lot in cultivating will-power and conservation certain social virtues. Now he is greatly changed. No more he believes in the caste system. He admits that caste is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Keeping this in view someone may think that the Mahatma has made much progress as he now believes only in *varṇa* but not in caste. But Dr. Ambedkar does not agree with them. He says that Varna as it is understood by Gandhiji is nothing but caste. He actually confuses one for another. Ambedkar says, “The essence of Vedic conception of Varna is the

---

pursuit of a calling which is appropriate to one's natural aptitude. The essence of the Mahatma's conception of *varṇa* is the pursuit of ancestral calling irrespective of natural aptitude". So as defined by the Mahatma, *varṇa* actually is nothing but another name for caste simply because the essence of both of them is one and the same-namely pursuit of ancestral calling. Actually *varṇa* and caste are distinct as chalk and cheese. Varna advocates determining ones calling on the basis of one's worth irrespective of birth, caste, on the other, advocates to do the same on the basis of one's birth irrespective of one's worth. So, the Mahatma, in fact, advocates the, caste system in the name of *varṇa vyavasthā*. Ambedkar says that the Mahatma has no definite and clear conception about the distinction between *varṇa* and caste and about the necessity of either for the conservation of Hinduism. Does he regard *varṇa* as the essence of Hinduism? In reply to this question Ambedkar says that it is not possible to give any categorical answer. The readers of his article on "Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment" will reply in the negative. But the readers of his article in reply to Mr. Sant Ram will reply in the affirmative. In putting the objection against Sant Ram Ambedkar says that how can a Muslim remain one if he rejects the Quran, or a Christian remain as Christian if he rejects the Bible? Here Ambedkar beautifully raises an objection against Gandhiji following the same reason. He says that if caste and *varṇa* are convertible terms and if *varṇa* is an integral part of Hinduism then how does the Mahatma claim himself as a Hindu as he rejects caste which is nothing but *varṇa*? Ambedkar here puts some objections – why this prevarication? Why does the Mahatma hedge? Has he failed to realize the truth? Or does the politician stand in the way of the Saint? Ambedkar assumes two alternative answers to these questions. One answer is – it may be due to his childlike temperament. And the second answer is – it may be due to the double role played by the Mahatma. His dubious role is the role of the Mahatma and a politician. He wants to spiritualize politics. A politician wants to deceive the society as he believes that a society cannot bear the whole truth and he must not

---

speak the whole truth as it is bad for his politics. The Mahatma is always supporting the caste and *varṇa* due to the fact that if he opposes them he may lose his place in politics. It is not so important to note that which one exactly is the source of this confusion, what is worthy to note that by preaching caste in the name of *varṇa* he deceives himself and the others as well.

I think the objection that has been raised here by B.R. Ambedkar against Gandhiji is most important. Ambedkar says that Gandhiji, in fact, hopelessly fails to understand the distinction between *varṇa* and caste. According to Gandhiji both *varṇa* and caste propose to follow the calling of our ancestors'. But Ambedkar says that this is not the case at all. *Varṇa* proposes to follow the calling which is suitable to our worth but irrespective of birth. Caste proposes to follow the callings of our forefathers on the basis of birth irrespective of our worth. The significance of this objection of Ambedkar is far-reaching Gandhiji strongly recommends for *varṇa*. He says that each and every person should follow the *varṇa - vyavasthā* as there is nothing wrong in it rather it ensures the wellbeing of our society. But caste, Gandhiji observes, should be annihilated for it gives birth to so many problems in our society. If Gandhiji really confuses *varṇa* for caste then the advice to follow the *varṇa vyavasthā* amounts to advise to follow the caste system and to advise to annihilate the caste is the same as to advise to annihilate the *varṇa vyavasthā*. So, Gandhiji suffers from serious contradiction. Therefore, the question comes – does Gandhiji really confuse *varṇa* for caste? A close scrutiny should be made on this point.

Apparently the distinction between caste and *varṇa* is crystal clear. Caste is determined on the basis of birth but *varṇa* is determined on the basis of worth. Here so far as the caste is concerned there is no problem but problem crops up in the case of *varṇa*. Is the process of being *Brāhman*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra* according to one's worth automatic or is it regulated? The first alternative cannot be true. Had it been automatic then saying of



---

*Varṇa Vyavasthā* and advising to follow the same in Śāstra would have been meaningless. In that case there would have been no difference between *Varṇa Vyavasthā* of Hinduism and the absence of the same in other religious systems of the world. This implies that the second alternative is true. But here the question arises – who will regulate the system? Will it be regulated by human being or by God? If the first alternative is accepted then a number of problems will crop up. We know that to err is human. So, there is every possibility that a man may commit the mistake in assessing the worth of a person. Secondly, the chance of manipulation cannot be overcome. The verdict of the authority concerned may not be obeyed by all. So, there is also the chance of chaos and anarchy. All these problems can be overcome if the second alternative is taken to be true. In Śāstra like the *Śrīmad Bhāgavat Gītā* and the Vedas it is clearly mentioned that God Himself regulates the system of *varṇas*. In Gītā it is said, “*Cāturvarṇam maya śṛstam guṇa karma bhībhāgasa*”<sup>ix</sup> It means four *varṇas* have been created by God Himself on the basis of worth (*guṇa* and *karma*). But it is absurd to maintain that God comes to us physically and regulate *Varṇa Vyavasthā*. How does He regulate the *Varṇa Vyavasthā* then? The only rational answer, I think, is that He regulates this system through the law of Karma. Following the worth of karma performed by a particular person God determines the birth of that person. More clearly to say on the basis of merit of karma performed by a person God determines whether he will take his birth in a Brahmin family or a *Sudra* family. So following the law of karma God regulates one’s birth and thereby He indirectly regulates one’s *varṇa* too. If one takes his birth in a Brahmin family then he becomes Brahmin by *Varṇa* but if he takes his birth in a *Sudra* family then he turns into *Sudra* by *varṇa*. Thus it is seen that birth turns into an identifying mark for both of the caste and *varṇa*. So, in that case both caste and *varṇa* propose one to follow the callings of one’s forefathers. Thus it is seen that there is nothing wrong in the observation of Gandhiji. If this is the case then how can caste be distinguished from *varṇa*? In reply it can be said that in the

---

case of caste birth stands both for identifying mark and defining characteristics but in the case of *varṇa* birth stands only for identifying mark but not for defining characteristics. Besides this Caste is the creation of the ill intention of some people living in our society, but Varna is the creation of the Good will of God.

If we agree with the above observation of Gandhiji then some problems inevitably crop up. According to the foregoing explanation the under given cycle follows –

From karma follow birth, from birth follow *varṇa* and from *varṇa* again follows karma. This cycle continues endlessly. In that case a Brahmin will remain a Brahman and a *Sudra* will continue to be a *Sudra* forever. If so then a *Sudra* can never enter into the territory of a *Brāhmaṇa* and vice-versa. But this does not accommodate with the spirit of the Śāstra. When Srikrishna in Gītā says, “*śvadharme nidhanam śreya paradharmo bhayābaha*”<sup>ix</sup> then it implies that the fact is otherwise. In *Caitannya Caritamrit*, it is said, “keba.....”<sup>ix</sup> It implies that the Śāstra inspires one to make an upliftment in the sphere of *varṇa*. One who belongs to the *varṇa* called *Sudra* should try his best to enter into the territory of Ksatriya or Brahmanas. In Śāstra we come across some instances of some persons who took their birth in lower *varṇas* but become capable of attaining higher *varṇas* owing to their worth, i.e. *guṇa* and *karma* in the same life. The Saint Viswamitra is the living example of this case. The name Prahallada is also well known who took his birth in the family of *Rāksasa* but became the renounced Bhakta of God. So, the position of M.K. Gandhi mentioned above is not supported by Hindu Śāstras too. Had the observation of Gandhiji been true Viswamitra could not have been a *Brāhmaṇa* who was *Kṣatriya* by birth? So, it needs to re-examine. I think, in the above explanation given to substantiate the position of Gandhiji one important point has been ignored. In the Śrīmad Bhāgavat Gītā, Krishna categorically mentions the criterion for

---

creating four *varṇas*. This criterion consists of two units – one is *guṇa* and the other is *karma*. In the earlier explanation *guṇa* which, perhaps is given the priority in the *Gitā*, has been ignored. So, *varṇa* determining factors are two – *guṇa* and *karma*. One may take one's birth in a *Sudra*-family but his *guṇa* may not be *Sudra*-like, his *guṇa* may *Brāhmaṇa*-like. In that case though one is *Sudra* by birth but the calling he has to follow is not the calling of a *Sudra* but the calling of a *Brāhmaṇa*. Viswamitra for example, was *Kṣatriya* by birth but as his *guṇa* was *Brāhmaṇa*-like he became *Brāhmaṇa* and followed the callings of a *Brāhmaṇa*. So, one's birth or one's callings of forefathers has nothing to do with the calling of a person. Thus it is shown that the observation of Gandhiji that *varṇa* proposes one to follow the callings of one's ancestors is not acceptable. So far as our observation is concerned, here deviation comes from the *guṇa*. One can come out of the traditional circle due to the new *guṇa*.

If we have a close look into the spirit of the *Śāstra* then it can be understood that the deviation may be taken place due to *karma* even. When in *Gitā* Sri Krishna says, “*Sadharme Nidhanam Sreya Paradharmā Bhayābaha*”<sup>ix</sup> it implies that if a *Sudra* follows and performs his *Sadharmā* that is the calling of his forefathers as perfectly as possible then that *karma* will lead him to take his birth in the upper *varṇa* that is in *Kṣatriya* or *Brāhmaṇa varṇa* in his next life. And in that case the view of Gandhiji cannot be countered like the above way.

A pertinent question arises – when Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, “*Cāturvarṇa mayā sristam guṇa karma bhivāgasa*”<sup>ix</sup> then what does it actually mean? Does it mean that the classification into four *varṇas* are being made by God through birth, if so, then why? If the classification is made on the basis of the *karma* performed by one in the previous birth, then what is the problem? If the same classification is made on the basis of the *guṇa* and *karma*

---

that is the natural aptitude and capacity of the persons of their present birth is it not more scientific and logical? The instance of Viswamitra and Prahallad substantiate this position.

#### Reference

<sup>ix</sup> B.R. AMbedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 44

<sup>ix</sup> *Chaitanna charitamrita*

<sup>ix</sup> Srimad Bhagbad Gita, 4/13

<sup>ix</sup> *Gita*

<sup>ix</sup> *Chaitanna charitamrita*

<sup>ix</sup> *Gita*

<sup>ix</sup> *Gita, 4/13*