Chapter-I

Introduction

Dr. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14th April, 1891 as a fourteenth child in a low *Mahar* caste family. He was a distinguished social reformer, a remarkable ethical thinker and political philosopher. He had been fighting till his last breath to uproot all sorts of social evils such as untouchability, exploitation, oppression and so on. He was dreaming of establishing a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity. Initially he was sincerely trying to set up such as a society within the parameter of Hindu religion. So he learnt Sanskrit very carefully and went through the *Vedas*, the *Upanishad*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Gītā* and the other fundamental books on Hindu religion and came to the conclusion that it is absolutely impossible to establish an ideal society, a *Samatā Samāj*, in his own language, within the per view of Hindu religion. Consequently, on 14th October 1956, Ambedkar left Hinduism and converted to Buddhism to fulfill his dream.

Ambedkar with other millions of Untouchables gathered so many inhuman bitter experiences in their lives. Ambedkar, in his school days was not allowed to sit on the same bench with his classmates. He was not even permitted to use the blackboard. None of the untouchables had the right to drink water from public wells and tube wells. They had been debarred from using water from public ponds. Their right to enter into the temples also had been vested. The untouchables had to bear a jar hanging from their necks to spite and also they had to carry brooms hanging from their backside up to the level of the soil to clean the dust of their legs. Ambedkar become fed up with these inhuman and brutal behaviors of the Hindu society. Generally he used to think that all human beings are equal. So equality should be the basis of an ideal human society. From a society which is based on equality the other two qualities, i.e. liberty and fraternity automatically follow. If all members of a society are

equally treated then it implies that they are brother like each other, and all of them must be free. Thus in a society like this, there cannot be any social evils in question. But Ambedkar observed that to set up such an ideal society within the platform of Hinduism is logically inconceivable. He maintained that *Varṇāśrama dharma* is an integral part of Hinduism. But *Varṇāśrama dharma* means "a social order of graded inequality". Where there is inequality there can't be equality, the basis of ideal society. Therefore, the ideal society of which Ambedkar himself was dreaming is not possible to establish at least in Hinduism. So he declared in 1935 "I have born as a Hindu but I don't like to die as a Hindu". In this year Ambedkar took the final decision to leave Hinduism. But he took long time, more than twenty years to decide to which religion he should be converted. And ultimately he considered Buddhism to be the best one to fulfill his dream. On 14th October 1956, Ambedkar with his numberless followers converted to Buddhism.

Ambedkar cannot accept the concept of an ideal society proposed in Hinduism. Now let us see that what is an ideal society according to Hinduism? If we have logical analysis about the different Hindu *Śāstras* then we can find out a clear picture about the ideal society depicted in Hinduism. First of all the ideal society according to Hinduism is not created by human beings themselves, rather, it is created by God. Even the very constitution of that society is also already made by God. Here in the ideal society of Hinduism God is all in all. Man infact is nothing but the doll in the hands of God. The people of the whole society have been classified into four *Varṇas* and this classification is again made by God Himself. The activities to be performed by the different *Varṇas* have also been prescribed by God. There is no room for the choice and freedom of the people living in that society. The most adverse aspect of this society is the graded inequality underlying the people living in that society. Through the *Varṇa* system the position and the status of some persons are made high and the positions and status of some persons have been made low. This inequality in question gives

birth to so many social problems. Through the *Varṇa* system the status of some of the people have been reduced to zero. They do not have their minimum dignity. They have been looked upon as untouchables. These people are considered inferior even to the animal like cow and dog. The cows and the dogs are not untouchables. They have their rights to enter into the temples, they have the rights to drink from public ponds but those untouchable inferior people do not have those rights. They are not allowed to enter into the temples, they are not allowed to drink and take their bath in public ponds. In a word, in the true sense of the term they are not human beings; at best they can be attributed as sub humans. This inequality established through the instrumentality of *Varṇas Vyavasthā* robes the liberty and fraternity of the particular section of people called downtrodden. The whole thing greatly shocked Ambedkar. Ambedkar himself along with his fellow *Mahars* from the very childhood went through different types of inhuman behaviors and humiliations from the people belonging to the higher *Varṇas*. Ambedkar was exceptionally brilliant and highly interested in education. All the bitter experiences he gathered from his childhood led him to take a vow to make all these untouchables free from the thralldom of the inhuman Hindu Society. But he knew that his dream can be turned in to reality only through proper education. Keeping this view in mind he became highly devoted to his study. One day he went abroad and took the highest degree from there while he was living in abroad, he saw that there in western countries all people are treated equally; there is no room for high and low, superior or inferior. Ambedkar got the taste of what is called a human being; he realized what is called dignity of a human being. Ultimately after finishing his study he came back to his pavilion and run through the same type of inhuman experiences like that of his earlier life. He got a service but his subordinates did not give him his due respect. From then onward Ambedkar started sincerely to look for the proper answer to the problem he and his fellow Mahar suffered from. After a long endeavor he discovered his answer in Buddhism. He saw that Buddhism is a religion

which can give birth to an ideal society he was searching for. Ambedkar observed that the ideal society called *Samatā Samāj* must be based on the three pillars of equality, liberty and fraternity. In Buddhism each and every human being is looked upon as equal. Consequently, the Buddhist society is based on equality. From equality automatically the liberty and the fraternity follow. As in Buddhism all human beings are equal one shows love and respect towards the other. Consequently, a bond of friendship or brotherhood prevails among the individuals living in Buddhism.

The Buddhist concept of man and society was really based on humanism in the sense that it brought man into focus, the man who was in suffering, and asked his fellow –beings to guide him in order that he could minimize his suffering by his own efforts. The Buddhists concept did not go into the mystery of man's origin and his relationship with the supernatural. It saw him only in a social situation, which could be either good or bad according to the *Kushal-Karmas* or *Akushal-Karmas*, good or bad *Karmas* of man himself. Society, in Buddhism, is not divinely created; it is the result of fellow human beings. It cannot be divided into water-tight compartments. It is based and sustained on the principles of *Karunā* and *Maitri*, that is, love and friendship. Without these human sentiments neither man nor society can exist and continue for a long time. The Buddhist concept of man and society is completely autonomous, and its autonomy is maintained, not by any external and supernatural force, but by man's *karmas* alone. The *Sheel-Sampada* the property of righteous conduct based on moral precepts is the real treasure-house of the Buddhist view of life.

Some of the followers of Hinduism have tried their best to substantiate the view that Hindu society is the best one. And as the Hindu Society is based on *Varṇa Vyavasthā* they tried to show that there is nothing wrong in it. In this regard we come across some of the fundamental views which support Hinduism. Here I like to deal with the views provided by the *Ārjya Samājists*. I shall discuss the arguments produced by *Ārjya Samājists* in favour of

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Hindu society and *Cāturvarṇa*. Subsequently I shall also deal with the arguments given by Ambedkar in order to counter the views of the *Ārjya Samajists*.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his book '*Annihilation of Caste*' says that there is a set of reformers who holds out a different ideal. They go by the name of *Ārya Samājists*. The *Ārya Samājists* in order to construct an ideal society propose to bring the four thousands caste of Hindu society under the banner of four classes called as *Cāturvarṇa*. One point is important to note here that they advise to make this four-fold division of *Varna* on the basis of *guṇa* (worth) but not on birth. Most of the people, I think, will certify this idea. No social reformer, in true sense of the term, accepts caste system which gives birth to a number of social evils. *Ārya Samājists* through the introduction of *Cāturvarṇa* suggest to annihilate the caste system. So the idea is excellent. But Ambedkar does not agree with the *Ārya Samājists*.

In the '*Annihilation of Caste*', Ambedkar says nothing about the merits of the view proposed by the *Ārya Samājists*. Even he does not mention any name of any person belonging to the *Ārya Samājists*. I think the name of Mahatma Gandhi can be brought under the umbrella of the *Ārya Samājists*. Because, Gandhiji repeatedly argues for the restoration of the *Varṇa Vyavasthā* in our society as it is advised by the different *Śāstras* of Hindu religion. Gandhiji says of the merits of the *Varṇa Vyavasthā* in different occasions. So I think the merits of the view of the *Ārya Samājists* can be shown following what is said by Gandhiji in this regard. Gandhiji says that caste system can't be accepted. It is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. *Varṇa* and *Āsrama* are institutions but caste is a custom. *Varṇa* and *Āsrama* have nothing to do with caste. There is nothing wrong in the *Varṇa* system, it is full of merits. The law of *Varṇa* teaches us to follow the calling of our ancestors which is conducive to the welfare of the humanity as a whole. It defines our duties but not our rights. He further says that no calling is high and low. All of them are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The calling of a Brahmin and the calling of a scavenger are equal and their

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due performance carries equal merit before God. Both are entitled to their livelihood and no more. Ascription of superior status by and of the *Varṇa* over another is a violation of the law. Gandhiji categorically says that law of *Varṇa* does warrant a belief in untouchability.

The view of the *Ārya Samājists* has been vehemently criticized by Ambedkar. He produces a number of arguments against their views.

Firstly: Ambedkar says that there is no justification behind labeling man as *Brāhmin*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*. A learned man would be honored without his being labeled a Brahmin. Likewise a solder would be respected for his devotion to the country without his being designated a *Kṣatriya*. In European society, he says soldiers and other servants are being honored properly without giving them permanent labels. It should be equally true in our society. So it is useless to distinguish the people into four-folds by labeling as *Brahmin*, *Kṣatriya* etc. what is said by Ambedkar us his Annihilation of Caste can be quoted which goes as, "I do not understand why the *Ārya Samājists* insist upon labeling men as *Brāhmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*. A learned man would be honoured without his being labeled a Brahmin. A soldier would be respected without his being designated a *Kṣatriya*. If European society honours its soldiers and its servants without giving them permanent labels, why should Hindu Society find it difficult to do without giving them permanent labels, why should Hindu Society find it difficult to do so is a question, which *Ārya Samājists* have not cared to consider."[1]

Secondly: The names like Brahmin, *Kṣatriya* etc pose so many problems because they are associated with the notions of hierarchy. Therefore as long as these names will be associated with the different classes, Hindus will continue to think of them as hierarchical division of high and low based on birth and behave with them accordingly. So the attempt to reform the Hindu society following the way prescribed by the *Ārya Samājists* must be futile.

"The names, *Brāhmin*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra* are names which are associated with a definite and fixed notion in the mind of every Hindu. That notion is that of a hierarchy based on birth. So long as these names continue, Hindus will continue to think of the *Brāhmin*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra* as hierarchical divisions of high and low, based on birth, and act accordingly."[2]

Thirdly: *Cāturvaṇra*, Ambedkar opines, is highly impracticable, harmful and has turned to be a miserable failure. "To me this *Cāturvaṇra* with its old labels is utterly repellent and my whole being rebels against it. But I do not wish to rest my objection to *Cāturvaṇra* on mere grounds of sentiments. There are more solid grounds on which I rely for my opposition to it. A close examination of this ideal has convinced me that as a system of social organization, *Cāturvaṇra* is impracticable, harmful and has turned out to be a miserable failure".[3] It is quite impossible to compel people who have gained a higher status based on birth without reference to their worth to vacate that status. It is equally impossible to compel people to recognize the status due to a man in accordance with his worth, who is getting a lower status based on his birth. "How are you going to compel people who have acquired a higher status based on birth without reference to their worth to vacate that status? How are you going to compel people to recognize the status due to a man in accordance with his worth, who is occupying a lower status based on his birth?[4]"

Forthly: Ambedkar holds that to establish the *varṇa* system in our society what is necessary first is to break up the caste system and subsequently to reduce all the people of four thousand castes based on birth to the four *varṇas* based on worth. Both of them are highly problematic. "For this you must first break up the Caste System, in order to be able to establish the *Varṇa* system. How are you going to reduce the four thousand castes, based on birth, to the four *varṇas*, based on worth? This is the first difficulty which the protagonists of the *Cāturvarṇa* must grapple with.[5]" What is said by Ambedkar is confirmed by the fact the

original four classes introduced in the *Vedic* period have now turned into four thousand castes.

Fifthly: Ambedkar points out of another problem in the way of the establishment of the system *Cāturvarṇa*. If it is taken for granted for the sake of argument that *Cāturvarṇa* is established then positively problems will crop up regarding the maintenance of the system. This system must face the problem of the transgressor. That is why in order cheek this problem, penalty system of the death may be induced in our society. The supporter of *Cāturvarṇa* does not think of it. "There is a third difficulty in the way of the establishment of the system of *Cāturvarṇa*. How are you going to maintain the system of *Cāturvarṇa*, supposing it was established? One impotant requirement for the successful working of *Cāturvarṇa* is the maintenance of the penal system which could maintain it by its sanction. The system of *Cāturvarṇa* must perpetually face the problem of the transgressor. Unless there is a penalty attached to the act of transgression, men will not keep to their respective classes".[6]

Sixthly: Ambedkar says of another problem the protagonist of *Cāturvarṇa* must grapple with. In this system a problem will arise regarding the status of women. Are the women to be brought under the banner of four-fold classes? Or are they to be allowed to take the status of their husbands? In either case the problem inevitably crops up. In the former case we have to accept women priest and women soldiers. In the later case the principle of *Varṇa* be violated as the division is not based on the worth of the women.

Seventhly: Assuming that *Cāturvarṇa* is practicable another important problem arises. In the system of *Cāturvarṇa*, *Śūdra* is looked upon as the ward and the three *Varṇas* as his guardians. But who is to safe guard the interests of the *Śūdras* if they are cheated by their guardians. Ambedkar says that inter-dependence of one class upon another is inevitable in the

system of *Cāturvarṇa*. He further maintains that in some cases inter-dependence may be allowed. But inter-dependence of one class upon another in the case of vital needs like education, defense and foods is not fair and good. "But why make one person depend upon another in the matter of his vital needs? Education everyone must have. Means of defence everyone must have these are the paramount requirements of every man for his self preservation. How can the fact that his neighbour is educated and armed help a man who is uneducated and disarmed. The whole theory is absurd.[7]"

Eightly: Ambedkar says that the society proposed by the *Ārya Samājists* can't be ideal which has already been proved. *Cāturvarṇa* is not new. It is as old as the *Vedas*. From the past it is seen that the clash among the different *Varṇas* had been a common phenomena. Several times *Brāhmins* annihilated the seed of the *Kṣatriyas* and vice-versa. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* are full of incidence of the strived between the *Brāhmins* and *Kṣatriyas*. So keeping everything in view it can be said that proposal for establishing *Cāturvarṇa* is no doubt a foolish choice.

As far as my observation goes some arguments may be produced in favour of the views of *Ārya samājists*. If a hairsplitting analysis is made then it can be understood that *Cāturvarṇa* actually is nothing but the division of labour. Division of labour in the name of *Cāturvarṇa* helps to increase the production in each and every aspect of society and thereby it helps to develop and enrich a society. This division of labour through the exercise of *Cāturvarṇa* ensures the development and wellbeing of the society because the division is made on the basis of worth i.e. the natural aptitude and capacity of the person concerned. If, for example, a person is highly intelligent then it is very natural that he will make a grand success in the field of education. Likewise if a man is stout and strong in the physical side and brave in mental side then it is quite natural that he will be a good soldier. In that case

society will get back a healthy return from both of them. Thus it is shown that the idea of *Ārya Samājists* is praise-worthy.

But if a careful scrutiny is made on the *Cāturvarṇa* prevailing in our society then it can be seen that the case is not as it appears to be. So far as the division of the labour the in the name of *Cāturvarṇa* in the Hindu society is concerned the division, infact, is based on birth not on worth as it is claimed. As a result that division is not as per as the capacity and the natural aptitude. But the division of the labour seen in European countries is based on worth in the true sense of the term but not on birth. So I think that the observation of Ambedkar is right. The concept of *Cāturvarṇa* makes a hindrance in the way of its objective. Our observation can be substantiated by what is said by Gandhiji. Gandhuiji says that *Varṇa Vyavasthā* teaches us to follow the callings of our forefathers for our livelihood. What does it mean? It means that the profession of us is not determined by our choice and worth rather it determined by our birth. If one follows the calling of one's forefathers then thereby he does not follow the calling determined by his worth he, infact, follows the calling determined by his birth. Thus it is seen that the concept of *Cāturvarṇa* is self defeating and therefore dangerous. This self defeating nature of *Cāturvarṇa* has been well understood by Ambedkar and most of the objections raised by Ambedkar against *Cāturvarṇa* are unanswerable.

References:

[1] B.R. Ambedkar: *Annihilation of Caste*, XV

[2] Ibid. XVI

[3] Ibid. XVI

[4] Ibid. XVI

[5] Ibid. XVI

[6] Ibid. XVI

[7] Ibid. XVII