

AMBEDKAR'S CRITIQUE ON CATURVARṆA AS AN IDEAL OF SOCIETY*

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The principal aim of each and every social reformer is to construct an ideal society. But the question is: how can an ideal society be constructed? What should be the ideal of an ideal society? In reply to these questions different views have been proposed by different social reformers. Ambedkar, for example, holds that an ideal society must be based on the three principles, viz. namely the principle of liberty, the principle of equality and the principle of fraternity. 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 *Caturvarṇa*. One point is important to note here that they advise to make this four-fold division of *Varṇa* 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 *Caturvarṇa* suggest to annihilate the caste system. So the idea is excellent. But Ambedkar does not agree with the *Ārya Samājists*. In this paper an attempt has been made to show why Ambedkar does not agree with the *Ārya Samājists*? On this issue the whole paper has been classified into three units. The first unit deals with the probable merits of the society suggested by the *Ārya Samājists*. The second unit deals with the arguments which have been raised by Ambedkar against the view of *Ārya Samājists*. In the third unit my personal views have been discussed.

I

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

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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. The division of caste is based on birth but the division of *Varṇa* is based on worth. So the question of confusing one for the other does not arise. 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 *Brāhmin* and the calling of a scavenger are equal and their 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.

II

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*, *Vaisya* and *Śudra*. A learned man would be honored without his being labeled a *Brāhmin*. Likewise a soldier 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 *Brāhmin*, *Kṣatriya* etc.

Secondly: The names like *Brāhmin*, *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.

Thirdly: *Caturvarṇa*, Ambedkar opines, is highly impracticable, harmful and has turned to be a miserable failure. 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.

Fourthly: 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. What is said by Ambedkar is confirmed by the fact that 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 *Caturvarṇa*. If it is taken for granted for the sake of argument that *Caturvarṇa* 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 to check this problem, penalty system of the death may be induced in our society. The supporter of *Caturvarṇa* does not think of it.

Sixthly: Ambedkar says of another problem the protagonist of *Caturvarṇa* 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 law of *Varṇa* be violated as the division is not based on the worth of the women.

Seventhly: Assuming that *Caturvarṇa* is practicable another important problem arises. In the system of *Caturvarṇa*, *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-dependants of one class another is inevitable in the system of *Caturvarṇa*. 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.

Eightly: Ambedkar says that the society proposed by the *Ārya Samājists* can't be ideal has already been proved. *Caturvarṇa* 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 to propose to for establishing *Caturvarṇa* is no doubt a foolish choice.

III

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 *Caturvarṇa* actually is nothing but the division of labour. Division of labour in the name of *Caturvarṇa* 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 *Caturvarṇa* 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 *Caturvarṇa* 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 in the name of *Caturvarṇa* in the Hindu society is concerned the division, infact, is based on birth but not on worth as it is claimed. As a result that division is not as per 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 *Caturvarṇa* makes a hindrance in the way of its objective. Our observation can be substantiated by what is said by Gandhiji. Gandhiji says that *Varṇa Vyāvasthā* 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. Thus it is seen that the concept of *Caturvarṇa* is self defeating and therefore dangerous. This self defeating nature of *Caturvarṇa* has been well understood by Ambedkar and most of the objections raised by Ambedkar against *Caturvarṇa* are unanswerable.

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