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Caste Discrimination and Reverse Discrimination in Indian Society: A Suppressed Dignity of the Marginalized

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The traditional Indian society has been biased against the Hindu brethren of the so-called lower castes within the fold. The particular communities were looked down upon as polluting even though animals were preferred the most. The touch, shadow, entry, communication was prevented for them with the so-called upper caste Hindus. During the period of Peshwai of the Marathas reign, the discrimination against the lower caste was reached to the zenith that the untouchables in the Poona city were not allowed to enter before 12 and after 3 in the day light. They were only allowed during 12-3 p.m. in the afternoon when the sun had been on the equator.¹ No education, no property, no money, no weapon and even no earning were allowed to them. This was actually, ordained by the sacred Hindu Shastras like Manusmriti and was followed since thousands of years and even today. The so-called civilized preachers and their blind followers had stolen their dignity and human rights.²

The Paper raises some pertinent questions whether these communities are Hindus or not? Being in the same religious fold why they are treated even lower than animals? What that compel the upper caste to have discriminations against them? Are they not the citizens of India? Are they not the shareholders of the natural resources of India? Is it not that this country belongs to them too? Why their human rights have been suppressed? Why they have been oppressed? Why they have been depressed? Why were they not allowed to have education? Why were they not allowed to keep weapons for self-defense? Why were they not allowed to earn property of their own? To answer all the series of question, the reverse discrimination or compensatory discrimination against historical wrongs done against these socially marginalized communities in India were to be started in the form of Social Justice. This discrimination against the particular communities of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes thought to be provided with the compensatory discrimination to bring those communities within the fold of egalitarian society.

Caste-based Discrimination

One of the significant discriminations by the caste system is that there have been religious taboos imposed on the members of the caste system although all these caste members are born in Hinduism. Various castes have their own religious taboos like Vedic Mantras or Puranic Mantras or No Mantras at all. The Brahmins argued that they are the only to be allowed to perform their rites and rituals by Vedic Mantras and none others. Even those who were such an orthodox, further argued that the Kshatriyas have not been existed on the earth at all in this Kaliyuga as only two Varnas i.e. the Brahman and the Shudra. Accordingly, the Kshatriya status of the Marathas was denied by the Brahmins. Instead, they assigned Mantras from the Puranas to the Marathas and regarded them the Shudras as like all other Shudras. The Vedic religion remained to be the monopoly of the Brahmins alone.³

Chhatrapati Shahu, the grandson of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was succeeded by Ramaraja and Ramaraja by Abasaheb alias Shahu II in 1777. The thread ceremony of Shahu II was performed with Puranic rites at the instance of Nana Phdanis. Chhatrapati Shahu II was succeeded by Chhatrapati Pratap Singh in 1808. The Vedokta controversy started in 1832 at Satara Princely State questioning Kshatriyhood of Chhatrapati Pratap Sing. He organized the debates on this issue. The Brahmins opposing Vedic rites was led by Raghavacharya Gajendragadkar and supporting party was led by Kayashta Prabhu scholar Vithal Sakharam alias Aba Parasnis. The Brahmins from Belgaon to Pune flocked at Vedshala in Satara. The Brahmin party was also backed by Patwardhans of Sangli. In the debate the Brahmins were defeated and existence of Kshatriyas in Kaliyuga was proved.⁴ This victory by Chhatrapati Pratap Singh of Satara, resulted that the Maratha dynasties like Bhonsles, Ghatges, Mahadiks etc. won over the Brahman purohits and the Marathas took themselves as the Kshatriyas and so the right to perform the rituals by Vedic Mantras only.

Second episode of this controversy again came to a debate at Baroda Princely State of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad in 1896 when the rituals were performed previously with 'Puranokta Mantras'. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule had already written about the Brahmanas and their looking down upon towards the others as castes as inferior to them through his Satyashodhak Samaj and his book 'Brahmananche Kasab'. Maharaja Sayajirao was under influence of Mahatma Phule's writings and hence resolved to perform all his rituals with Vedic Mantras only like his neighboring states of Rajputana. Accordingly, he issued the order with effect from 15th October 1896 which was strongly opposed by the orthodox Brahmins.⁵ The then popular paper 'Kesari' published by Bal Gangadhar Tilak also criticized the decision of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad.

The third episode of this Vedokta controversy came to be happened at Kolhapur Princely State of Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj in 1900. This controversy was much serious than previous two. One of the Purohit refused to perform Vedokta Mantras at the Kartik-Snan of Shahu Maharaj and

justified it as Maharaj belongs to Shudra and this can be performed with Puranic Mantras. It is said this was brought to the notice of Maharaj by another Brahman Rajaram Shastri Bhagwat and later on that Purohit was removed from the service. A well-known historian Y. D. Phadke has also supported this view in his book that the principal purohit of Maharaj, Appasaheb Rajyopadhye was not in favour of Vedokta Mantras to be performed for the Maharaja's rituals. Consequently, the Inam lands of the Purohita were confiscated. When Shankaracharya advocated the argument of Rajyopadhye, then the Inami lands inherited by Shankaracharya were also confiscated. Some scholars have also been giving other views on this episode that the Vedokta rituals which were discontinued were to be restarted again and accordingly, Shahu Maharaj had issued an order in 1901 and Purohit Rajyopadhye was removed from the services. He then challenged this removal to England, appeal to Political Agent (British Resident), Government of Bombay and finally to Government of India of which decision came on 9th May 1905 rejecting Rajyopadhye's claim.⁶

When the Kings and the Princes were discriminated based on their castes, then it can only be imagined what social status would be of the other castes. Therefore, only this historical caste discrimination is meant for the reservation or positive discrimination in the Indian society. However, nobody thinks of it or object to it. The Brahmins were all the generations had been educated and hence all kinds of knowledge were confined to them only. They were regarded as the 'Earthly Gods' and if not, they have the capacity to invoke all the Gods and Goddesses. Even without them, no religious function could be carried forward right from the conception until death and aftermath. Any kind of a person from any category, used to bow before a priest. Even, they have power to instill life in the image of the god in the temple. Nonetheless, they use these kinds of facilities even today.

Positive and Reverse Discrimination with Affirmative Action

Compensatory Discrimination for the Marginalized insinuate as social justice through Affirmative Action or Positive Discrimination by University Grants Commission and reservation in education, services and polity. Therefore, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had warned in the Parliament on 26th January, 1950,

"On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life, we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."⁷

Like his mentor, Mahatma Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar also felt that education is *sine qua non* of human progress.⁸ So far castes are concerned, according to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, people are not wrong in observing caste. In his view, what is wrong is their religion, which inculcated this notion of caste.⁹

Recently, the castes groups were asking for reservation in employment in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana etc. but don't want to leave their castes or do not want to get themselves looked down upon being the reserved category and so the backwards castes.

EWS-Reservations

Some recent trends are leaning towards reservations on the basis of economic backwardness as they interpret reservations as the programme of poverty amelioration. But they don't think that in Indian corrupt system anybody can get the certificate of the economically backwardness. One can be economically backward by his bankrupt habits and will get certificate of the same. Anybody can be backward and forward many numbers of times in their generations. But social backwardness is perpetual in Indian society though the socially backward, now have become economically forward but in India they will remain socially backward in perpetuity.

In India, the reservation seems to be codified in the Dharmashastras and started since the time immemorial by the so-called upper Varnas that is Brahmins. For instance, the education was restricted to be imparted to other varnas. When it was initiated, then was codified that Brahmins will start it at the age of 8, Kshatriyas would get it at the age of 11 and Vaishyas at the age of 12. Although, the Sudras were not allowed to get education at all. The right to teach other Varnas was reserved for the Brahmins; the right to become a temple priest as well as perform all the ecclesiastical performances was also reserved to the Brahmins. Even today, after so many centuries this reservation still in perpetuation. All the Shankaracharyas have been from single caste and right to perform all the religious rituals also have been reserved for a particular caste.

Each religious Mutt like the Shankaracharya Mutts is presided over by a male, unmarried swami. The Brahmins, to whichever Mutt they belong, adore this swami. Through the power of their Brahmanic monopoly over the media, they frighten even non-Brahman leaders to publicly prostrate before that swami.¹⁰ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for depressed classes and a separate settlement and later separate religion are the political programme based on this caste consolidation method.¹¹ Carter G. Woodson, a Black Historian and educationist asked his people to use 'segregation against segregation'.¹²

To mention, whenever there is any spiritual festival or any kind of ritual from birth, initiation ceremony, marriage, or a death of a person in the society, only a member from a Brahman caste or a Brahman Pandit is invited to perform the rituals and religious rites. So, far festivals like Satyanarayana Pooja, Ganpati festival, Kali Pooja or any kind of Pooja, only a Brahman Pandit is required to be available at the host of the Pooja or sacrifice. Even today, people believe that by doing certain sacrifice, will get them prosperity, children, success, love affairs, marriages and even ward off the evil spirits and all this in consultation of the said Pandits. It is very much then make it clear the position of the Brahman in the society is well stratified and they are regarded as pre-eminent caste in the society.

If we take a historical background of Positive or Reverse discrimination in India, we find that in the colonial Madras Presidency (Tamil Nadu), other Backward Classes launched a Dravidian Movement for the reservations in education and services and it is still in prevalent there.

In the year 1874, the Prince of Mysore decided to limit the percentage of Brahmins in the Police Department to only 20% and rest was reserved for non-Brahmins.¹³

Another kind of reservation was recommended by Hunter Commission in the year 1882 based that:

1. The persons, who are able to read and write, should be appointed in the British Government as Lower-level officers.
2. The responsibility of education should be entrusted to District and municipal Boards.
3. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule criticized these recommendations as the above reservation was meant for the educated class. He asked the government to start the education in schools and reservation in the services for the backward classes. He demanded free and compulsory education.¹⁴

The Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur Princely State introduced reverse reservation in his state in the year, 1902. He provided reservations of 50% to backward classes excluding Brahman, Parsi, Shenvi and Prabhu.¹⁵

The modern-day reservation was introduced by the British by the Indian Council Act, 1909 (Morley Minto Reforms) by the system of Separate Electorates to Muslims at the instance of Muslim organizations. Subsequently in the year 1919, Indian Council Act (Montagu Chelmsford Reforms), in which political reservations in the form of Separate electorates were extended for Sikhs, Anglo Indians and Indian Christians.¹⁶

Maharaja Nalwadi Krishnaraj Wadiyar IV, the King of Mysore, on August 23, 1918 formed a Committee to explore reservations for the backward classes when his administration was dominated by the Brahmins.¹⁷

Then in the year 1928, Simon Commission recommended some political reforms for India and accordingly, the Round Table Conferences were held in London where Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar demanded Separate Electorates for the Depressed Classes in India. Gandhiji opposed this demand and when British Premier Ramsey McDonald declared the Award of Separate Electorates, he went on Fast unto Death against these awards at Yerwada Jail. This award had given only 78 seats in whole of India to the Depressed Classes. After lot of negotiations between Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Gandhicongress leaders, it was very important to save the life of Gandhiji. Hence, the Poona Pact (1932) was signed between Congress leaders and Dr. Ambedkar which gave reserved seat numbering 148 to the Depressed Classes.¹⁸

Finally, the Constitution of India incorporated the Reservations in the year 1950 for SCs and STs in education under Articles 15(4) and 29, reservations in jobs under Articles 16(4), 320 (4), and 333 and political reservations under Articles 330 and 332.¹⁹

Conclusion:

The caste-based discrimination has been rampant in India as it has divided the Indians into thousands of castes and subcastes. There has been the caste hierarchy by which one caste looks down upon to other caste and the Dharmashastras are the supporters for this system of casteism. Every caste follows its rites and rituals as provided by these shastras and puranas. The Kings and the Princes have not been spared from the casteism. Therefore, the solution, to some extent to the problems faced by the victims of this system has been worked out as the reverse discrimination and the affirmative action has been suggested and implemented by the rulers and the government of Independent India. These therefore, the principle of Aristotle 'Equals to be treated equally, unequal unequally' is the only justice in Indian society.

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