

AMBEDKAR'S WAITING FOR A VISA: STIGMA OF CASTE

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Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was an architect of Indian Constitution, a renowned Economist, Political Thinker, Social Activist, Indian Jurist, Law Minister of India, Social Reformer and socially, culturally and politically uplifted the social stigmas such as a class-discrimination, untouchability, vulnerability, humiliation, social exclusion and backwardness of lower class in Indian scenario. He took steps forward to eliminate those social stigmas from the society. His notable works in this direction are: *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1917), *Riddles in Humanism* (1987), *The Annihilation of the Caste* (1936), *Who were the Shudras?* (1946), *The Buddha and his Dhamm*(1957) *Waiting for a Visa* (1990) and so on. He played an important role in Poona Pact Agreement (1932) that embodies the favour of depressed class involvement in legislative councils. He was awarded India's highest award *Bharat Ratna* in (1998), posthumously. Born in Maharashtra in *Mahar* Community, Ambedkar grew with the pangs and lamentation of this deprived class and determined to reform the class oriented cultural, social, political, economical benefits of this community.

Ambedkar pointed out the deeply-rooted social stigmas in India in the expanded form of practice of untouchability in India society .This was an offspring of a life- long age-old caste system, that was delighted by the highest class of society at the expanse of lowest class. Mahatma Gandhi was also in favour of abolition of untouchability in Indian caste-system. Mahatma Gandhi coined the term and gave new name to untouchables as Harijan (people of god). While Ambedkar focused on the particular names as 'untouchables', 'Depressed class' , 'Dalits', or the 'Scheduled Castes' to highlight their life-long social journey of injustice. According to Verna, Hindu

society is divided into four castes. 1- Brahmins (the Priest) 2- Kshatriya (the Soldiers) 3- Vaishyas (the Traders) 4- Shudras (the Servants). As per the enumeration: higher class treated lower class as servants without any liability of social recognition. Ambedkar was with a highly exploitative sense of recognition, took faith to reform, reconstruct and annihilate the caste-system in society. The caste system in India fissures the society. It was Mahatma Gandhi who took the initiatives to uplift the untouchables and eradicate the woes of depressed class of society. Along with Gandhi, Babasaheb was also deeply hurt by discriminative policies regarding this community. Henceforth, he elaborated his own experiences as an untouchable person and elimination of vulnerable people from social acceptance in his short autobiography.

Waiting for a Visa (1990) is Ambedkar's short autobiography, written in 1935-36 and published as a booklet in 1990, posthumously. Included in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches* (1993) subsequently. The text has been taught as a syllabus in Columbia University. The contents of *Waiting for a Visa* are: denouncement of upper class that untouchability is an anathema on the society, the highest class of society treated untouchables as a sinner and untouchability as a sin, higher class of people can be polluted only by the single touch of the untouchable, lower caste of people not be equated to higher caste because of their caste. The title *Waiting for a Visa*(1990) has metaphorical connotation. The word 'Visa' means acceptance of a person as a citizen of the country and country would take the complete protection, safety and custody of that person. So, the title '*Waiting for a Visa*' suggests that depressed caste of the society still awaits for the favorable reception,

greetings, salutations and acceptance not only from the Indian government but also from the society in general. The contemporary Hindu society of that particular period was not agree to accept Dalit, Mahars, Bhangis, Dhedh as equal to them. Not only Hindus but also Muslims and Parsi were not in favor of untouchable. The episodes of Ambedkar's life and other Dalit person experiences account the distinctive practices of the Hindu, Muslim and Parsis communities.

The gruesome torture of his childhood memories is palpable in the First Chapter of the text. Marginal community in pre-independence India was much worse than the colonial reminiscence of suppression. It highlighted the very significant point in Indian context that Dalit community had to face the serious challenge of 'drinking water'. Ambedkar discovered that he was an untouchable at the age of nine. Discriminative practices of school and society filled him with a grief and left indelible impression on Ambedkar's mind. The emancipation of his family and community were ignored that was intolerable for the child, Ambedkar. In this way, we learnt that there was degradation of human values.

Second Chapter of *Waiting for a Visa* is a vast account of penetrability and hopelessness of minorities. By his critical reasoning Ambedkar learnt that even though post graduated from Columbia University and Barrister-at-Law from London could not find accommodations in the State of Baroda due to his demean, degrade and plight class of belongings. In an unfortunate situation, he learnt that "a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi." (pp672,WV) He was an unwanted guest in Hindu hotel as well as Parsi Inn because of his caste. We come across how society was lacking humanistic ethos and morality on the basis of caste- based discrimination.

Dalit Community centric framework of Third Chapter, reveals that how the lacking knowledge and ignorant nature of Dalit deprived them of from being welfare. The philosophy of Hindu caste-system suffered the underprivileged class with poverty-stricken trauma. "the *tongawalas* were not prepared to drive the tonga with a passenger who was an

untouchable" (pp674 WV) Degradation of humanistic values is apparent in the superiority complex of that *tongawala*. He refuses to hire untouchable passenger because it is beneath his dignity. An exposition of caste system in India annihilated the morality, humanity and ethical values in society.

Fourth Chapter, recalls the accountability of the privileged class who declined the sufferings, woes and pathetic degradation of underprivileged class. Through the narratives of this chapter Ambedkar explains that a person who is untouchable to a Hindu is untouchable to all religion. The purity and chastity of water in any religion cannot be polluted by the single touch of an untouchable. Even in the pure month of Ramadan, how water can be polluted only by the single touch of an untouchable? Is it the teaching of Islam? These are irrational practices of society. It explains that inhumanity and unethical values were render in society. The class discrimination had very strong impact on Hindu, Muslim and Parsis.

Fifth Chapter of the text, is articulated by another person of Dalit Community, who was a teacher. It unfolds the injustice with that Dalit teacher, whose wife met her fatal end due to the lack of health care and medical aid. Ambedkar closes the episode by drawn the meaningless conduct of an educated doctor whose sense of high distinct class overpowers him rather than his profession. The doctor declined to touch ailing woman because of her caste. Professional values, professional ethics are differing for this marginal i.e. the devastation of fundamental values of humanism.

Sixth and the last chapter, is a true account of exploitative tendencies of distinguished class. It describes the pathetic tale of a Bhangi clerk, who appointed as a Talati (village patwari- scribe) but never received the grace of the post and honour as a clerk in the government office because of his Bhangi class. The deep seated preconception among the villagers forced that Bhangi clerk to leave the post of clerk and went back to Bombay and leave with his parents. The widespread practices of untouchability prevail in society to that extent where they threaten

the Dalit to suppress the vitality. This Dalit community centric text is seeking social acceptance from the society.

The narrations of incidents are uttered by Ambedkar. The art of writing of this text is divided into six chapters. The fifth and sixth chapters are woes in the form of tale by another person in the respect of their indignity and dishonor on the basis of their caste identity. The identity, dignity, liberty, equality, honour, respect, grace, gratitude of scheduled caste were lacking in the earlier domain of Hindus. Indian Constitution gives equality, fraternity and justice to all the marginal. The beauty of our constitution lies in the Article 17 that states the abolition of untouchability in society and

resolved the apple of discord. At present, the realistic and pragmatic approach of society is much better than the yesteryears because of the design of our Article 17. We should be grateful to the drafting committee of our Constitution for the drastic changes in the society.

WORKS CITED

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