



Caste Issue a challenge in Pre-Independence India

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INTRODUCTION

The caste system is immemorial in India. It means that a person's social status is obligated in which caste they were born into. The different concepts of the caste system related to varna, jati, occupational work (paisha) divisions among people. Risley defines caste as "a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling, and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community". (Hutton)¹

In this article, I will analyze the Indian National Congress strategy towards and comprehension of caste. I will get some unmistakable patriot pioneers who had an incredible impact on Congress. A significant element of the early many years of the Twentieth century was the expansion of caste gatherings and developments. If we read about the caste question in the late nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century then we found that westernization of the Indian culture cut down the subject of caste during public arousing in India.

Untouchability, a social evil has won in Indian culture in its ugliest structure preceding autonomy. The high caste Hindus considered even the dash of low-class individuals as contaminating and such individuals were made to live in edges of the town or town like the homes of low caste Bakha in the novel Untouchable. The Question of caste framework is arranged in India for settled standards and readiness of strict perspectives in the general public. In the pre-independence period caste issue also came into light with another social issue as movements started against British colonialism. To an extent, one could

¹ . Hutton, J. H. Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins. Bombay: Indian Branch, Oxford UP, 1963.

characterize nineteenth-century India as filled with social and religious discourses. The caste issues expanding the various boundaries and political administration of changing situation identified with Dalit's condition. The movements were multidimensional either on political, economic or social parameters with the demand of caste identity. The non-Brahmin movement slowed ups and downs and finally create a society where every group of people started fighting for their caste identity. The movement created waves of social mobilization which altered the political equation in the state because it included communities other than the Brahmins. After depending on Brahmin's mercy for a long time, the non-Brahmin movements started fighting against the caste hierarchies. The main goal of the movements needed to crash the castism-social stratifications in society. The movements against the domination of the higher caste were led by social reformers. Infact the caste hierarchy is maintained according to Varna, even it can be said that endogamous and hereditary of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank in society.

Indian National Congress & Caste Issue

Before the days of independence, the caste issue had been widely spread among the people. The establishment of the Indian national congress in 1885, was also an expression of political unity. However Indian national congress initially avoided the social issue and focused on mass support and politicization to gain liberation from British rule. Even Dadabhai Naoroji at the second annual congress meeting states that " To represent to our rulers our political aspirations, not to discuss social reform ".²

The Indian nationalist reformers started to meet but it was not easy to handle the social issues due to the threat of division in Congress. The requirement of the support base and by 1917 the one-seventh of the Indian population that was untouchables those were socially deprived but politically important " Depresses Classes"³.

The untouchables groups of madras and Bombay recognizes with non-Brahman, were in a fear that the Indian national congress was a high caste elite would dominate any Indian representative body⁴.Members of the Indian National Congress (INC hereafter) were acutely aware of the existence of

² . P.C.Ghosh, The Development of the Indian National Congress 1892-1909, Calcutta : K.L.Mukhopadhyay,1960.p.73

³ . The Depressed Classes of India: An Enquiry into their Conditions and suggestions for their uplift: with an intro. , Rajendra Singh Vatsa , Gitanjali Prakashan, 1977

⁴ . See Eugene Irschick , Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separation, 1916-1929 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,1969). Gail Omvedt covers " The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India,1893 to 1930" in Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust,1976).

caste in India as a "social problem. But this acknowledgement of the existence of caste was not anywhere near a Dalit consciousness as it did not question its desirability. The official recognition of caste in INC ran from being upper-caste contempt towards the lower castes to a kind of neutrality/studied silence. As early as 1887, the INC decided to frame rules for itself and appointed a Committee for that. In politics, caste consciousness played a great role in the mobilization of the masses. Caste influence became more pressing and relevant in economic and political spheres.

As is stated here the despised 'low caste' people are 'not respectable', ignorant, have 'no stake in the country/nation and have no credentials to know of any of their 'rights'. During the late 19th century or the time of early career of Indian National Congress, such contemptuous, berating, and exclusionary and almost 'racist' narratives were common. Very many Presidents of the INC had spoken of caste in their addresses such as Dadabhai Naoroji (1886), Anand Charlu (1891), Alfred Webb (1894), R.M Sayani (1896), C. Shankaran Nair (1897), A.M.Bose(1898), Sir Henry Cotton (1904), Mr G K Gokhale(1905), etc. And caste was also mentioned in its resolution pleading for changes in the Arms Act repeatedly for ten years from 1893 till 1903. We know that the Arms Act (1878) was discriminatory and stipulated that Indians cannot carry Arms without license or permission. There was a general resentment amongst Indians who understood its implications. And the repetitive Indian National Congress resolution on it demanded that it be implemented without any distinction of caste, creed or colour. Its implication for us is that European (rulers) and the gun-carrying Indians (there were not many of them during those days) be treated equally so far as arms are concerned. In this instance, caste was invoked to emphasize discrimination and desirable equality before the law, but only law and only for the gun-possessing Indians. This issue of equality before the law only and for a few only remained the prism through which caste was seen by the early nationalists in India. And there was a silence about equality not only before law but also in social practice, economic transactions and political decision-making and for all.

In 1914 the Social Conference had welcomed the goal on Depressed Classes training, wherein, Mrs Annie Besant went against giving uniform schooling of all caste's understudies. She said "For them, the encompassing, their fabrics and their lifestyles so harm their actual body that an individual who carries on with a spotless and healthy life swearing off solid beverage, going without meat, endures genuinely by interacting with these despondent ones whom society has set in hopeless conditions. These miserable conditions draw back from them since they are what we have made them. That you will undoubtedly recall. Along these lines, I am talking obviously. I'm not for it. I realize some are agreeable to combining up as one in similar schools these troubled youngsters with those more joyful kids prepared in better methods of living. I say to you as I have said in England that we should initially have school to socialize them and afterwards to permit them to blend in with different youngsters. Else you run the peril of corrupting as opposed to raising them, and the standard of social change is to step up and not to even out

down. Subsequently, we should give schools where the troubled child who might not learn at home will be educated in the schools"⁵.

In 1917, the resolution on 'untouchability' was adopted by the INC in its Calcutta session, which spoke of discrimination based on caste for the first time. The 1917 resolution read as follows:

"This Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience" ⁶.

The Indian national congress becomes equivalent from the establishment in 1885 and frames of 1919 when Gandhi arose as a surprising chief. There was no doubt that Gandhi raised numerous issues and become the principal head of joined front against the British Empire on each part of patriotism. In the congress there arose a discussion among patriot pioneers on whether caste and distance issues ought to be raised on the political stage or not⁷. Gandhi gave a new term (Harijan) to the untouchables on various occasions and also settled the ' Harijan Sevak Sangh' (servants of the untouchables society) and also introduced the weekly, Harijain mainly to the welfare of the " men of God "⁸.

Anyway, the most significant inquiry depended on the best way to manage some of the per pilgrim social progression on caste, class, sexual orientation and strict nature. There were likewise other beyond reconciliation inconsistencies, for example, between landowning predominant ranchers and landless rural work and this framework was additionally connected with between prevailing upper castes and lower caste gatherings.

Although Gandhiji focused on the upliftment of the Harijans and their restoration in the Hindu society with honour and joy and keeping in mind that he suggested confidence for all, he unquestionably preferred helping the Harijans. He was not for a noble cause. Yet, he was surely for help, help to the sad segments of society. In his specific manner, he had started a few thoughts and examinations to help and help Harijans. The Harijan Seva Sangha was the association that completed significant work for the improvement of the states of the Harijans. The main thing to be noted here is that Mahatma Gandhi, the

⁵ . Indian National Congress Report, 1917, P.129

⁶ . Manjit Singh, UNTOUCHABLES RECOGNISED AND BETRAYED (1917—1923) proceedings of the Indian History Congress Vol.40 (1979), JSTOR

⁷ . Kumar Ravinder, Class Community and Nation: Gandhi's Quest for a Popular Consensus in India, Modern Asian Studies, vol. iii. 2 M.K.Gandhi: An Autobiography or. The story of My Experiments with Truth (Ahmadabad, 1984) pp.89, 9

⁸ . M.K.Gandhi: An Autobiography or. The story of My Experiments with Truth (Ahmadabad, 1984) pp.89,

Congress chiefs and those pioneers who became pastors after Independence, had the normal philosophy and strategy of regarding Harijans as a component of the Hindu society and this likewise implied the Hindu electorate at different levels. He enlisted his essential contrast with Mahatma Gandhiji the type of the Poona Pact of 1932 by which he gave a notification to the Congressmen that the Harijans would foster their initiative and force and program and might want to practice their vote in their electorate. This reasoning and program which was in resistance to the Congress strategy and program should be taken as isolated and rebellious even from Mahatma Gandhiji's perspective. While Mahatma Gandhiji was not loath to autonomous, testing draws near, he was for all viable purposes for a bound together and composed way to deal with the country's issues of winning freedom, financial and mechanical modernisation. His thoughts and plans appear to be closer to the plans and projects of the Congress party than those of Ambedkar represented a separate turn of events, separate electorate, separate gatherings and strategies for his kin since he didn't confide in the standard, dominantly upper castes Hindu, Congress administration.

This time caste framework in India was the paradigmatic ethnographic illustration of caste and ascend with Dalit pioneers in patriotism. The primary figures of this bigger nonAryan and hostile to the Brahmin vision of Indian patriotism were Jotiba Phule, E.V. Ramasami' Periyar' and Ambedkar and there were numerous others in India like Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in Uttar Pradesh and Mangoo Ram in Punjab. This was a cycle of Dalit development that assaulted on abuse and Brahmin patriotism. As per Periyar appearance of Brahmanism was the genuine essence of Indian nationalism.⁹

Eradication of Untouchability

To an extent, one could characterize nineteenth-century India as filled with social and religious discourses. The caste issues expanding the various boundaries and political administration of changing situation identified with Dalit's condition. The movements were multidimensional either on political, economic or social parameters with the demand of caste identity. The non-Brahmin movement slowed up and downs and finally create a society where every group of people started fighting for their caste identity. The movement created waves of social mobilization which altered the political equation in the state because it included communities other than the Brahmins. After depending on Brahmin's mercy for a long time, the non-Brahmin movements started fighting against the caste hierarchies. The main goal of the movements needed to crash the castism-social stratifications in society. the movements against the domination of higher caste led by social reformers.

The main goal of the movements needed to crash the castism-social stratifications in society. They were motivated by the non-Brahman movements and kept their distance between the downtrodden condition of

⁹ . Geetha, V./Rajadurai, S. V. (1998), Towards A Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothethass to Periyar, Calcutta

untouchables and success destination through annihilation of caste. The movements depend on social situation and consequent fashioning belief system which stands contradistinction to an existing order¹⁰.

The efforts of lower caste movements related to the removal of caste hierarchy in society. The non-Brahmin movements in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka and Bengal shows different levels of perception of caste inequalities and the backwardness of the Shudra caste. The movements from the efforts launched under the leadership of Jyotiba Phule of Maharashtra worked for changing the social order through upliftment of untouchables and his Satyashodhak movement took a sharp turn in the twentieth century and become a non-Brahmin movement. Maharshi Vitthal Ramaji Shinde was also raised socioreligious reforms and established a 'Depressed Classes Mission' for the education of the Dalits. His greatest contribution was to remove the practice of untouchability and bring about equality to the depressed classes in Indian society. E.V.RAMASWAMY NAICKER had completely clarified the significance of Self-Respect and the explanations behind its rise. "The Self-Respect Movement was introduced not for talking sick of a specific local area or order, however, to obliterate the social disasters as a whole¹¹.

The last decade of the twentieth century has seen a sharp attestation for character among the mistreated segments under the initiative of Ambedkar, Jotirao Phule, Shahu Chhatrapati, master Achhootanand, Keshavrao Jedhe, Dinkarro Javalkar, Shri Narayana master, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, Vitthal Ramaji Shinde and so forth It is additionally imperative to comprehend that social class versatility on account of Dalits ought to be found with regards to liberation and social change instead of basically and reductively expecting it as a financial battle, despite the thought and battle of the pioneers like Dr B. R. Ambedkar. The movements also created awareness among all communities other than the Brahmins. Indeed the non – Brahmin movements could be interpreted as expressions of deprived sections of lower castes against the dominant features of upper castes.

There was a lot of discussion among the Indian public congress and numerous non-brahmins developments and lower caste developments on the highlight how to manage caste framework's principles. In the lower caste developments, Ambedkar manages caste while the congress could oblige such countless developments. G. Aloysius in his examination of Nationalism without a Nation in India has contended that there was not one recorded alliance in India during the pilgrim time frame, there were

¹⁰ . John Wilson, Introduction to Social Movements (New York: Basic Books,1973) P.90

¹¹ . Kudi Arasu, 2nd August, 1931, p.4.

two chronicled coalitions that were hostile to one another. He additionally calls attention to how the caste upheld utilized it as veil as contradicting the frontier rule over the prejudice of the oppressed society that was helped for utilizing political weapons, the lower caste developments.

If we peered out the Nationalists and Congress' vision on the issue of social separation on the dependent on caste, they didn't worry in the underlying phase of patriotism and impedance by the pioneers since it was not fit the thought of social progressive system and caste. Therefore, they scrutinized the right of colonialists in the setting of obstruction in the convictions and confidence like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal. While there were numerous individuals like M.G. Ranade consented to the analysis of social disasters based on western origination of judiciousness. He was an Indian researcher, social reformer, equity and creator and the individual from the Indian public congress party. Ambedkar clarifies and reprimanded the public development on the caste issue he wrote in "The Mook Nayak" in which he portrayed the social state of untouchables and oppressed areas. He composed "the effect of social inequality on the people called untouchables has been devastating. The vast masses of untouchables are undoubtedly sunk deep into the confluence of feebleness (helplessness), poverty and ignorance. Meanness produced by their slavery with which they have been used to for many years is keeping them backwards.

The stigma of untouchability has restricted their freedom of profession and therefore, their efforts to remove their poverty are not fructifying. The untouchables do not know (education) because they are poor and they are powerless because they do not know. This is correct logic but it should not be forgotten that it reduces the importance of those who are fighting against the practice of untouchability. The real humanity lies in breaking the barriers¹².

Conclusion

Along these lines in India, the prevailing society in history was offering shape to patriotism with purported new present-day esteems, which was only an endeavour to modernize the old custom. The social arrangement of India which was before represented by the local area and male-controlled society is currently changing as far as accounting for a statement of individual rights just as the privileges of recently subjected gatherings, for example, lower castes. There have been people who not just survived the battles prompting these changes however they attempted to work with and reshape the progressions

¹² . Babasaheb wrote in the first issue of The Mook Nayak - The Leader of the Silent, Taken from the first editorial written by Babasaheb originally written in Marathi for the very first issue of Mook Nayak published in January 1920. This translation was first published in July 2010 by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Research Institute in Social Growth, Kolhapur. Translated by Dr B.R. Kamble.

through their cooperation just as through their appearance on those changes. Both Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar have a place with this class of people. Their lives have been a mix of political activism and hypothetical reflection. Ambedkar was the individual who raised the issues of untouchables and discouraged classes from putting together a development against the higher castes. Ambedkar was not for simply political and monetary independence from imperialism however he needed a total change of the general public with a huge sociopolitical bundle to improve the states of those external the Hindu overlap. He has teamed up with the British since he needed to guarantee for his local area the admittance to training and portrayal in administrative bodies so they could be shielded from social persecution and imbalance.

Thus, I tried to focus on congress attitude towards the problem of untouchability. There was also debate among the Indian national congress and non-brahman movements about untouchability. Initially, Congress was largely silent about social issues with a few exceptions. Later Gandhi began to raise some major issues which were so far untouched. There was a struggle against Brahmin hierarchy in the caste system with the demand of eradication of untouchability. However, congress could accommodate and engage with other ideologies and its relations with lower caste movements are somehow ambiguous. The question of untouchability was a major framework for all movements and struggles. To this extent, one could characterize the nineteenth century as a period filled with social and religious discourses and movements that were likewise is a mix of political activism. However, it was also a hypothetical reflection and a major test for the Indian national congress on the caste issue.

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