

Sahidul Islam

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES OF INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM

Abstract

Indian caste system had a prolonged historical and religious backup. The historical root of Indian caste system lie submerged in Hindu religion. Hindu religion admits varna system. There are four varnas, such as, Brahmin, Khatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. A shudra even if he possesses admirable qualities and superior to other higher caste in terms of quality has been regarded as untouchable because he was born in a shudra family. Ambedkar was against such birth oriented caste system. He claimed that all men are equal as humans and every human has the right to enjoy liberty, equality and fraternity. It is injustice to deprive one from human rights simply for the reason that he or she belongs to lower caste. The superiority or inferiority of men should be evaluated in terms of qualities but not in terms of the caste in which he belongs to. From historical perspective, it can be said that the varnavyavastha of Hindu religion actually weakened the national unity and integrity. Being a social and rational humanist, Ambedkar severely criticised the so-called caste system of Brahmanism within Hinduism. As a reformed humanism, Ambedkar does not believe in unfounded faith and religious dogma. His humanism measures everything with regard to reason. He rules out the religious view that God determines everything and the rituals that we notice in Hinduism are nothing but dharma. The present study entitled the theoretical understanding of the philosophical and religious perspectives of Indian caste system.

Keywords: *Religion, Caste, Varna system, Fraternity, Hinduism, Philosophical, Liberty, Equality.*

Introduction

Casteism and Hinduism the great failure of Hinduism is to handle casteism in a dynamic manner. Although Gandhi has been known as the champion of Hinduism and Indian spiritualism, but many would say that Gandhi completely failed to casteism within Hinduism. Even his clash with Ambedkar at the time of the Second Round Table Conference reflected it very well that he put his identity as a Hindu before that a national leader. In this regard,

SAHIDUL ISLAM, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India., Email-Id: sahidbapan@gmail.com.

many lower caste people expressed their dissatisfaction about Gandhi's version of anti-communal Hinduism. In this regard Ambedkar remarked that "this Gandhi age is the dark age of Indian politics. It is an age in which people instead of looking for their ideals in the future are returning to antiquity." It is harsh. Ambedkar in this regard acclaimed that even the dalit's perception of modernity over the Hindu version of tradition is far more acceptable and progressive. The so-called Hinduism was reflected in Nehru as well. Like Gandhi, Nehru too took the existence of Hindu identity. However, Nehru ignores religious identity for building a modern India. The vision of modern India needs economic and technological development more than religious identity. According to Nehru, religion as such can "have no importance in the larger scheme of things." Nehru inclines to say that there is no point in saying that India is identified with Hinduism in which caste is to be condemned, but still he thought Brahmanic Hinduism as the 'national religion'. He says, "The mixture of religion and philosophy, history and tradition, custom and social structure, which in its wide fold included almost every aspect of India and which might be called (Brahmanism or its use a later word) Hinduism, became the symbol of nationalism. It was indeed a national religion, with its appeal to all those deep instincts, racial and cultural, which form the basis everywhere of nationalism today."

Nehru conceives caste from functional and integrative point of view. For him caste was a group system based on service and functions. It is supposed to be an all-inclusive order having no common dogma. Thus in a sense "every group from the state to the scavenger was a shareholder in the produce".

Buddhism and a different Interpretation of Casteism

Buddhism appeared long before Hinduism. The Buddhist vision of casteism is completely different from Hinduism. According to Buddhism, caste was nothing but a projection of the Brahmanic ideas. Buddha denied all biological (jati) differences among human beings. Instead of he defined and understood a person just by what he or she did. A man is identified not on the basis of jati, but on the basis of action or karma what he or she did. Buddha was born in a Naga (perhaps a trope for a tribal oligarch) family. He was against Brahmanic; he was against the caste system. He opposed to caste, the untouchables known as Chandalas. The Chandalas are always shown as enemies of brahmanas. In fact, Buddhism played a leading role to determine social order contrary to Brahmanism. Buddhism banked on social reform rather than rituals. In Dhammapada it is said, "There is no fire like passion, no chains like guilt, no snare like infatuation, no torrent like craving." Everything is flexible, transparent and momentary lasting for a moment. Buddha banked on universal compassion, love, care and seeking the welfare of all. He remarked, *attadeepabhav* (be your own lamp), be your own refuge. Buddhism by no means the only religion or teachings, but in many ways it was hegemonic and shaped

the civilisation of early India. Its main message is transience; it has never been a static religion like Hinduism. However, by the middle of the first millennium, Brahmanism was on the ascendance along with its black vision of a varnashrama –based society. This is the point from where casteism was developed and formed. Of course, resistance came from Buddhism and to some extent from Muslim as well. Muslim besides Buddhism bore a message of equality. As a mark of it there emerged Sufism which voices in favour of equality and love of god. Parallel to that, there appeared and developed dalit-bahujan which had laid the foundation of radical bhakti as a new revolt against Brahmanism. As neither of these was involved in politics, their voice did not sound much before Brahmanism. This clearly shows that the relevance of casteism of Brahmanism was not at all reflected in the same manner in Buddhism. It has been articulated by Brahmanism itself.

The dominance of Brahman on Hinduism

It is indeed true to say that the domination of Brahmanism on Hinduism was colossal. Hinduism has paid for this. In fact Brahmanism shades Hinduism. Hinduism dominated by Brahmanism was designed to deceive the masses and in turn established upper-caste hegemony. It considered caste as slavery by way of making religious illusion. Thus, in a sense Hinduism has been treated as a religious deception. Jyotirao Phule appeared not only as a dalit but also described as an 'affluent OBC' caste. He not only raised voices against Brahmanism, but also his polemical works attacked Brahmanism. Phule sought to unite the shudras (non-brahmins) and shudras (dalits). For him dalits were not only oppressed but also downgraded because of their earlier heroism in fighting Brahman domination. For him the shudras and shudras jointly represented an oppressed and exploited mass. While inventing the traditional Aryan theory, Phule took his critique of Brahmanism and caste to a mass level. Brahman rule seized state power and religious hegemony to maintain exploitation. It seems to us that Phule's theory appeared as a kind of emergent historical materialism where economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. Phule has been treated as the founding figure in Maharashtra not for the very reason that he was anti-caste but also by the farmers, women's and rural-based environmental movements. Like all major dalits and spokesmen of the low castes, Phule attempted to establish an alternative religion based on religious equality. He vehemently rejected Hinduism because of its superstitious nature. He talked in favour of Sarvajanik Satya Dharma. Where the father becomes a Buddhist, the mother a Christian, the daughter a Muslim, and the son a Satyadharmist. This clearly suggests that there is no place for a 'Hindu'.

Caste system though has been widely condemned for its various defects but it has gathered in the course of vast journey from the ancient times to the modern era. There we notice proponents and opponents both Hinduism and

Casteism. Many would say that Hinduism has a great unifying force. Contrary to that there we notice a perception where Hinduism has been conceived as the most fearful and pernicious theology or religion where downtrodden and low caste people were treated through the worst-social arrangement. For them Indian caste is the condensation of all the pride, jealousy, and tyranny of an ancient and predominant people. Hinduism in the name of caste actually robbed common humanity. According to Smith, the main loophole of Hinduism is that it treats caste system from dogmatic point of view. Actually it shuts off Indians from free association with the foreigners. As a result of that Indians in most general cases fail to understand the foreigners. The upper caste, particularly, the Brahmins would not mix with the foreigners. This actually made Hinduism as a narrow based religion. It has a long historical background. It was there in the Hindu society in the ancient times and had carried its defects in the modern era. In this regard, Nehru said, "Probably caste was neither Aryan nor Dravidian. It was an attempt at the social organisation of different races, a rationalization of the facts as they existed at the time. It brought degradation in its train afterwards and it is still a burden and a curse; but we can hardly judge from it from subsequent standards or later developments."

However, if we carefully read Hinduism after Gandhi, we have slightly a different interpretation. Undoubtedly Gandhi was a firm believer of Hinduism and Indian spiritualism. His interpretation of Hinduism in most general cases differs from others. For Gandhi, caste system (Varnashrama) is inherent in human nature and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. As a result of that a man cannot change his Varna by choice. To deny the Varna is to deny the law of heredity. Having said this, Gandhi does not think that creation of innumerable castes within the fold of Hinduism is good for this religion. Rather it is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. We do not think that all created castes within Hindu religion have historical significance. Most of the caste within Hinduism was unorganised and unscientific lacking inherent worth or reason. However, the four divisions of caste actually define social duties but in no way regulate or restrict social intercourse. They confer no privileges. Therefore, there is no point in saying that Hinduism being a religion offers the higher or lowest status to the Hindus. The genesis of Hinduism is that all are born to serve God's creation. This does not make sense to say that Brahmin is remitted from bodily labour or from the duty of protecting himself and others like a Kshatriya does. A Brahman is a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart learning to others. This again does not make sense to say that it prevents the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes to have. Thus, it seems to us that Gandhi advocated in favour of four divisions of caste. According to Radhakrishnan, 'the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust'. Caste was the answer of Hinduism; it was the instrument by which Hinduism civilised. According to Wilkins, it is by means of these distinctions that the Hindu religion has been so well preserved.

Our point of contention is that from Historical perspective the system of castes has survived for so many centuries and is still going strong. It has passed through various conflict stages over the centuries and even in the teeth of extreme opposition from many quarters, within and outside, Hinduism as a religion speaks volumes about its strength, merit and usefulness. It is based on division of labour and it enables not only economic independence and spiritual bliss, but also overall social security. Even though its rigidity and exclusiveness has often been criticised and condemned but eventually it proved most useful features towards preservation of Hindu religion and culture particularly in the medieval period when the Islamic onslaught had emerged the very existence of Hinduism. Thus, it seems to us that the so-called defects associated with Hindu caste system were misnomer in the sense that they were created or are being created out of false interpretation of Hinduism. To know about Hindu religion is to know about truth; the inherent worth of Hinduism lies in its proper understanding of the inner most worth, i.e., spiritualism. It has been stated that the caste system believes in the policy of collaboration and co-operation and insists that the law of social life should not be cold and cruel competition but harmony, cooperation and willing assistance. The individuals of the society are not rivals. Every man has its own individual nature and habit developed on the basis of his own historicity and trained in a particular manner under particular circumstances. Naturally, it would be extremely difficult to adjust in another group different from the one of its origin. Radhakrishnan says, "each man is said to have its own specific nature (Svabhava) fitting him for his own specific function (svadharma) and changes of dharma of function are not encouraged. A sudden change of function when the nature is against its proper fulfillment may simply destroy the individuality of the being." Every man has or possessed some dominant characteristics. However, there is no point in assuming that such characteristics are exclusive to the concerned persons. The dominant characteristic of Brahmans of learning and acquiring knowledge; the Kshatriyas of fighting, the Vaishyas of trade and commerce and the Shudras do not possess any of these as highly developed. Having said this, nobody denies the fact that all people possess all qualities though in different degrees. The Brahmin has in him the possibilities of a warrior. When caste system came into existence every vocation had at heart the service of the society with an eye at perfection. Professional excellence rather than monetary gain was the chief source of satisfaction and pleasure. It has been anticipated by many great thinkers as well. Radhakrishnan shared the same perception as well. For him the caste idea of vocation as service never encouraged the notion of work as a degrading servitude to be done grudgingly and purely from the economic motive. Indeed the worker has the fulfillment of his being through his work. According to Bhagavad-Gita one obtains perfection if one does one's duty in the proper spirit of non-attachment. Fortunately, the world is so arranged that each man's good turns out to be the good of others. The work of a man is the expression of his life. He was dominated

by the impulse to create beauty.

As per as division of labour is concerned there is no place in the caste system for the envy, jealousy or frustration for failure to find opportunities for financially better vocations. Having said the caste system has degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance. It tends to perpetuate inequality and develop a spirit of exclusiveness. This is no longer surprising because nothing can remain unaffected for a considerable period of time. Even great religion like Hinduism and Christianity could not remain unaffected over the course of history. Like Hinduism, caste system too is an evolutionary process. Initially, it was in the name of Jatis and subsequently in modern era it came to be known as caste. Most of the ills of the caste system developed when materialism gained precedence over spiritualism and the monetary wealth over professional satisfaction. Caste system is nothing but a self-evolving institution appeared much earlier than the Rig Vedic period. Being of self-evolutionary character the system has not been created by any authority, mundane or divine. Those who ascribe it to Manu, should know that Manu was only a rishi, who wrote whatever he saw. It is humanly impossible to collect millions of people from all over the country and divide them in four parts.

The historical development and formation of Hinduism There is no question of doubt that the genesis of Hinduism lies in casteism. It is a sort of division of labour. However this sort of division unfortunately appears as a sin before the downtrodden people of India. In the name of caste, millions of people were treated as nonhumans and Ambedkar was the victim of that. The main contention of this sequel is to explore and analyse the concept of caste, the concept of untouchability and the relationship between caste and untouchability after Ambedkar. It is true to say that unlike other religions; there we do not find any specific historical and anthropological evidence regarding Hinduism. Many would say that Hinduism is a series of jungles and it would still remain unclear who were the real Hindus. Having said this, one thing is very clear that the locus of Hinduism is spirituality. Hinduism acts and runs with the verdict of inviolable dictums of spiritualism. It is said that “beginning with the Zg Vedâ to the philosophers and even contemporary political leaders, it has been seen as a unique phenomenon of spirituality linked to a practical life...” As Hinduism has no definite starting point, over the course of history it gave birth extensive social inequalities without scientific basis. Having said this, Hinduism has its own virtues which cannot be ignored from historical and social-philosophical perspective. Its greatest virtue is the elasticity, its comprehensiveness, its diversity in terms of plurality and above all lack of dogma. Even many would say that real Hinduism has no ‘orthodoxy’, but it would certainly be a debatable issue. Having said this, the contribution of Hinduism to the world religion is colossal. Hinduism is functioning under Vedâs and Upanishads and under the womb of these two religious texts, Jainism,

Buddhism, and Sikhism was developed. The genesis of Hinduism is Vedanta philosophy. Vedanta is the last word or last judgment of Hinduism because 'the ultimate duality has been resolved into a unity in the Vedanta of non-duality.

The term Hindu is ancient deriving from Sindhu, the river Indus. Its root is Vedas and is presently known as Hinduism. It was developed and was ranging from the Upanishads and the formation of Vedanta thought to the amalgamation of the social order represented by the Manusmriti. Subsequently, it was known as Brahmanism, and Buddhism and Jainism. During this period it has been widely known as 'Hindustan' or 'Al-Hind' in Arabic. The main contention of Brahmanic Hinduism was the identification of orthodoxy where the recognition of the script Vedas had been promulgated. At that time the ideas of Varnashrama dharma, the fourfold system of castes and stages of life as the ideal of social structure had been formed. In fact the Brahmanism had a tremendous absorptive and co-optive power regarding caste-hierarchy. It is learnt that a material foundation of this social order was laid in 'the village productive system of caste, jajmani and untouchability'. However, it remained unexplored whether the masses of the people at that time identified as Hindus. Even today within Hindus there we observe numerous local gods and goddess who remains the Centre of popular religious life. The same was prevailing in the past. Some of the non-Vedic group even rebelled against caste hierarchy of the so-called Brahmanism. As a result of that there developed some non-Hindu religious traditions, such as, Sikhism, Veerasaivism etc. The real construction of Hinduism actually began during the colonial period. It was Lokmanya Tilak who promulgated 'Aryan theory of race' as the mark of upper caste Indians along with the sacred text Vedas as the core religious literature. The so-called Brahmanical leadership was developed with the public celebration of Ganesh Festival. During 19th century we notice another perceptual change of Hinduism under the leadership of Shivaji, the founder of Hindu raj through which Hindu conservatives were mounting a full-scale attack on their upper caste reformed rivals. This trend had further been extended during 1920 with the name of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) where full-scale Hindu nationalism in the name of Hindutva was formed. Hindutva appeared as Hindu nationalism and it went against Muslim religion. Its strongest base was in North India where the slogan in the name of 'Hindu-Hindu Hinduism' bears lot of sense. As the same region was dominated by the previous Muslim emperors, there were still a large numbers of Muslims. As a result of that, there appeared religious conflicts between the two rivals. The ideological formulation of 'Hinduism as Nationalism' was developed as distinctive religious community. In fact, peasants, artisans, and others identified themselves in religious terms with 'Hindus' and 'Muslim' communities and as a result of that there emerges independent entities what Gyan Pandey terms as ' the construction of communalism in north India'. Such communalistic religious approaches eventually took shapes at national level. There we witnessed two superseding

national identity of which one led by Gandhi and the other led by Nehru and the leftists. Gandhian vision was to make India as coalition of communities within the paradigm of 'unity among diversity' based on tolerance and love. On the other hand, Nehru emphasised more on secular identity along with the line of modernity and socialism and in turn rejected religious communal identities.

Interestingly, Gandhi identified himself as Hindu with his breathtaking interpretations of what is meant to be a Hindu. The Vedâs, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are Hindu scriptures according to Gandhi. All these scriptures narrated Indian spiritualism. Gandhi rejected or denied anything as Hinduism that does not suited with the very idea of spiritualism. Thus, for Gandhi true Hinduism actually bestowed in true spiritualism. He proclaimed him as a Hindu because of his firm belief on Indian spiritualism. Gandhi says, "Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spontaneously experienced." Caste has nothing to do with religion. It would indeed be a misnomer to attach casteism with Hinduism. Such attachment or tag is extremely harmful to both spiritual and natural growth. According to Gandhi, "Varna and Ashrama are institutions with have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us earn our bread by following the ancestral calling.... The calling of the Brahman – a spiritual teacher- and of a scavenger is equal and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man." It seems that Gandhi's social vision had been projected as a 'green' projection of a sustainable, decentralized society that appeared as a revolt against the so-called powerful industrial society and it had been ended with Hinduism what intellectuals termed it as "Ram raj" which spoke only upper caste interests.

The greatest virtue of Hinduism is tolerance for this it has paid a lot. Its enemies have taken advantage of it. Having said this Hinduism as a religion must now be strong, fierce and proud. Our national religion is Hinduism and as a result of that all new social and economic movements are centered within the womb of Hinduism. As a result of that there we observe religious conflict between Hinduism and Muslims. Historical point of view, the Mandir-Masjid was a case in point. Instead of conceiving Hinduism as universal religion, the pathfinder of every other religion, people are starting to interpret as 'Hindu-nationalism' and as a result of that all sorts of religious conflict were created in the name of religion. God has been divided in the name of temples, mosques, and gurdwaras. We can divide the earth, we can divide the sea as we like, but we should not involve us to divide humanity. There can be many 'isms', but there is one and only one 'Isms' and it is Humanism', the genesis of all, the unification of all. It is the Truth, the Sat, the Satya, the Sat-Cit-Ananda according to Gandhi. By name one is Hindu, another is Muslim, another is Christian, but in the context of humanity there is no nominalism. Thus one

has to understand the essence of humanism. In this regard, Kabir says,

“The Hindu says Ram is dear,
The Muslim says Rahiman,
They quarrel, fight and kill each other
Never knowing the essence”

Even within Hinduism there we witness many conflicts in the name of upper and lower caste, in the name of Varna and also in the name of various sub-isms. As nobody knows who the real Hindu is, everybody involves into a conflict to establish himself as the real Hindu. Hinduism is nothing but a pseudo-religious-political concept. As Hindu was born just two centuries back, he is still a colourless, odorless, and formless illusory artificial construction. The term ‘Guna’ is a part of broader tradition which has given alternative traditions of Indian identities in the name of lower castes, dalits and non-Brahmins. In contemporary era, they relied heavily on some great dalit leaders, such as, Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar. In contrast to the secularist opposition to Hindutva, they voice in favour of a new radically transformed non-Hindu identity and in contrast to reform Hindu identities’ they define ‘Hinduism’ itself as an oppressive class, caste and patriarchal force”.

Philosophical and religious perspectives

In this sequel we propose to examine and exemplify the philosophical and religious perspectives of Indian caste-system. Indian caste system was the creation of Hindu religion. Therefore to understand the philosophical and religious perspective of Indian caste system, we have to discuss it with regard to Hinduism. The term Hindu is ancient, deriving from Sindhu, the river Indus. The Hindu religion as it is described today is said to have its roots in the Vedas. Most archaeologists today doubt that the Aryans were the main force responsible for the destruction of this civilisation , but it seems fairly clear that many of their early poems celebrated its downfall, with the rain god Indra claiming to be the ‘destroyer of cities’ and the ‘releaser of water’. In any case, whatever we call the religion of these monadic clans, it was not the religion that is today known as Hinduism. This began to be formulated only in the period of the founding of the Megadha-Mauryan state, in the period ranging from the Upanishads and the formation of Vedantic thought to the consolidation of the social order represented by the Manusmriti. Unlike Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism was known as Brahmanic. Hinduism was known as Brahmanism reworked and absorbing many indigenous traditions. It attained social and political hegemony during the sixth to tenth century and very often confronted with Buddhism and Jainism. There is no caste discrepancy or inequality in Buddhism and Jainism. However, Hinduism as religion actually sprouted caste inequality and caste hierarchy. The major strands within what

was later to be called Hinduism were known separately in the south as Shaivism and Vaishnavism and their influence spread throughout south-east Asia as separate traditions.

The philosophy of the main themes of Brahmanic Hinduism or in short Brahmanism were the identification of orthodoxy with acceptance of the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmans and the idea of varnashrama dharma—the fourfold system of castes and stages of life— as the ideal social structure. Advaita, the identification of a self or atman within each individual with the universal ‘Brahman’ was the favoured philosophy. Brahmanism had a tremendous absorptive and co-optive power as long as dissident elements accepted their place within a caste hierarchy. The material base of this social order lay in the village productive system of caste, jajmani, and untouchability. It is indeed doubtful whether the masses of the people at this time identified themselves as Hindus. There were numerous local gods and goddesses who remain the center of popular religious life even today and the period gave birth to bhakti or devotional cults which rebelled against caste hierarchy and Brahman domination. Even many of these in turn developed into religious traditions that consider themselves explicitly non-Hindus. Sikhism, Veerasaivism etc., are cases in point. What then is the construction of Hinduism? The major work of constructing Hinduism was done by the Indian elites. In the 19th century, people like Lokmanya Tilak adopted the ‘Aryan theory of race’, claimed a white racial stock for upper-caste Indians and accepted the Vedas as their core literature. Tilak was also the first to try and unite a large section of the masses around Brahmanical leadership. By the end of the 19th century, Hindu conservatives were mounting a full-scale attack on their upper-caste reformist rivals with charges that the latter were anti-national. However, over the course of time, ‘Hinduism as nationalism’ was a growing identification with religious community. Even Gandhi identified himself as a Hindu. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are Hindu scriptures. Gandhi rejects anything that does not fit his idea of spirituality. Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spontaneously experienced. Inevitably this very acceptance of the Hindu identity historically and philosophically meant an absorbing of the caste element of this identity. In this regard Ambedkar says, “Caste has nothing to do with religion... it is harmful to both spiritual and natural growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. The calling of a Brahman – a spiritual teacher- and of a scavenger is equal and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man.” Thus, the philosophy of Hindu religion was a formulation that accepted a hierarchy place or calling for a human being and would obviously be rejected by militant low castes. Gandhi’s vision and philosophy of ‘Ram raj’ made him ultimately not simply a Hindu but also an

indirect spokesman for upper-caste interests. Of course, Gandhi had his biggest aspirations, confrontations and failures on the issue of caste. His conflict with Ambedkar at the time of the Second Round Table Conference clearly showed that he put his identity as a Hindu before that as a national leader. Indeed many of the lower castes were in the end alienated from Gandhi's version of anti-communal Hinduism and it is clear from the remark of Ambedkar who once said that 'this Gandhi age is the dark age of Indian politics'. According to Ambedkar, it is an age in which people instead of looking for their ideals in the future are returning to antiquity- was harsh. Like Gandhi, Nehru took the existence of a Hindu identity for granted. In contrast to Gandhi, his idea of building a modern India was to ignore identity, seeing it as ultimate irrelevant in the modern world. In this regard Nehru said, " In my opinion, a real solution will only come when economic issues, affecting all religious group and cutting across communal boundaries, arise ...I am afraid I cannot get excited over this communal issue, important as it is temporarily. It is after all a side issue, and it can have no real importance in the larger scheme of things."

The Brahmanic stream had its philosophical side, based largely among forest recluses, and its ritual side, found among the intellectual advisors of the rising kings. Buddhists and other shramanatreands also had their spiritual foundation among those who had renounced all worldly desires but not all of these lived on the forests. The support of their thinking came from the rising merchant classes and many of the working peasantry. This was true of both Buddhism and Jainism. Caste was only in an incipient phrase at this time, a projection of the Brahmanic ideas. Who is a Brahman? A Brahmin is one who is born for seven births in a Brahman family, or someone who behaves nobly, by birth (jati) or by action (kamma). Thus, it seems that Hinduism acknowledges biological differences among human beings. Buddha, however, denied all biological (jati) differences among human beings, and defining a person by what he or she did. One of the Buddhist jatakas (tales) described the contention of the time: the Buddha, born in a Naga, i.e., probably a trope for a tribal obligatory family, is arguing against the theme of a cousin praising Brahmanism. The Buddhist vision of society and the state differed profoundly from the Brahmanic. The main duty to the Brahmanic ruler was to enforce the law against varna-sankara, the mixture of castes. Buddhism was unalterably opposed to caste. Not only did he deny it, in many ways the Buddhist texts show a leading role for the untouchables of the time, known as Chandalas. The opposite of the Vasetthasutta in the Sutta Nipatta is the Vaselasutta which describes the ancient hero Matanga, a glorious spiritual hero before whom nobles and Brahmans bowed down. The Chandalas are always shown as enemies of Brahmans. Buddhism played a leading role in contesting the field of defining social order with Brahmanism, and within this gave an important role to untouchables. Bahujansukaya, bahunhitaya was the memorable phrase that was used to characterize the social goal of the Buddha: a universal compassion, seeking the welfare of all. And the last words of the Buddha, attadeepabhav,

are your own lamp, be your own refuge, characterized heart of his teachings. Buddhism thus proved to be transient in India.

The Caste Structure in India

On the basis of caste system or division of Varna, there develops caste structure in India. In Hindu society, caste divisions play a part in actual social interactions and in the ideal scheme of values. Members of different castes are expected to behave differently and to have different values and ideals. These differences are sanctioned by Hindu religion. According to Hindu religion, individual's position in the caste structure is fixed by birth and is, to this extent, immutable. Formerly, birth in a particular caste fixed not only one's ritual status, but by and large, also one's economic and political positions. Even though today we have different economic and political positions in spite of one's birth in a particular caste, but caste is still very important in setting economic and political limits. Thus, the term 'caste' requires some philosophical discussion. What is the philosophy behind the caste system? Why the caste system appears as the determining factor of everything, such as, economic, social and political rights? Is it merely a convention or something else? From philosophical perspective, we can say that what people mean by caste in day to day life is different from the meaning it has in its traditional literature. Sometimes by 'caste' people mean a small and more or less localized group; at another times the same word is used to refer to a collection of such groups. This ambiguity in the use of the term reflects one of the basic features of the caste structure. The English word 'caste' corresponds more or less closely to what is locally inferred to as *jati* or *kulam*. In addition to these, many of the villagers, particularly the Brahmins, are familiar with the concept of Varna. Although the term *jati* and Varna refer normally to different things, the distinction is not constantly maintained. Varna refers to one of the four main categories into which Hindu society is traditionally divided. *Jati* refers generally to a much smaller group. The English word 'caste' is used to denote both. Thus, there is no real contradiction between *jati* and Varna. Thus, it is quite common for a person to say that such and such an individual is a Brahmin or even a Kshatriya, by *jati*. Within a given context such use is intelligible. However, some have tried to solve the problem by using the terms 'caste' and 'sub-caste' to refer to primary divisions and their sub-divisions. But this is not altogether satisfactory because the caste system is characterized by segmentation of several orders. The caste system gives to Hindus segmentary character because 'a caste group cannot be considered as a self-contained whole – as a society in itself – but only as a segmentary, or structural, group in the entire system.'

It will now be seen that just as the total system can be broken down into a large number of castes, there in turn can be grouped together into a few broad divisions. These primary divisions are of great sociological significance, and a consideration of their nature provides a good starting point for our

analysis. Historically and religiously, the Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and Adi Dravidas not only live in different parts of Sripuram, but also in some measure regard themselves as having separate identities. Historically, they have occupied different positions in the economic structure of the village and these differences continue to exist. Apart from occupying rather different positions in the economic, political, and ritual systems, the three groups of castes are in the popular mind associated with different qualities and attributes. The most striking difference between Brahmins on the one hand and Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas on the other is in their physical appearance. The difference is summed up in various popular sayings, one of which runs as follows: Parppankaruppumparaiyanschappumahadu. It means dark Brahmins and light Paraiyas are not proper. In a common image the Brahmin is regarded not only as fair, but also sharp-nosed, and as possessing, in general, more refined features.

These differences are of significance because fair skin-colour and features of a certain type have a high social value not only in Sripuram, but in Tamil society in general and in the whole of India. The Brahmins are extremely conscious of their fair appearance and often contrast it with the 'black' skin colour of the Kallas. A dark-skinned Brahmin girl is often a burden to the family because it is difficult to get a husband for her. Traditionally, fair skin colour has been associated with the 'Aryans' from whom the Brahmins claim descent and with whom they are now identified by leaders of certain separatist political parties. The gotrasystem, which is an essential feature of Brahmin social structure, links each one of them by putative ties of descent to one another sage after whom the gotra is named. Besides, dress also is in some ways distinctive of caste in a broader sense of the way. Among Brahmins, men are required by tradition to wear the eight- cubit piece of cloth after initiation.

Philosophy of Hinduism

What does Ambedkar mean by philosophy of Hinduism? Is philosophy of Hinduism the same as that of philosophy of religion? Religion is something definite, whereas there is nothing definite in philosophy. According to the story, the two were engaged in disputation and the theologian accused the philosopher that he was 'like a blind man in a dark room, looking for a black cat which was not there.' In reply the philosopher charged the theologian saying that 'he was like a blind man in the dark room, looking for a black cat which was not there but he declared to have found there.' Philosophy was described long ago by Plato as the synoptic view of things. Philosophy thus attempts to see things together to keep all the main features of the world in view, and to grasp them in their relation to one another as parts of one whole. It thus draws ultimate conclusions about the nature of the world-process and the world-ground. Thus, the philosophy of religion is to be taken as meaning an analysis and interpretation of the experience in question upon the view of

man and the world in which he lives. Philosophy of religion thus takes the help from historical facts disclosed by the history of religion. As Tiele puts it, "all religions of the civilised and uncivilised world, dead and living", is a historical and psychological phenomenon' in all its manifestations. According to Ambedkar, if this is philosophy of religion it appears to me that it is merely a different name for that department of study which is called comparative religion with the added name of discovering a common principle in the varied manifestations of religion. Ambedkar's understanding of philosophy is different from the traditional sense of philosophy. For Ambedkar, philosophy means teaching and secondly, it means critical reason used in passing judgments upon things and events. Ambedkar then understands the word religion in terms of theology and in these regard he sets aside himself from the two convention types of theology, such as, mythical theology and civil theology. Ambedkar advocates natural theology which is the doctrine of God and the divine, as an integral part of the theory of nature. Besides natural theology, there is another class of theology known as Revealed Theology. According to Ambedkar, the best method to ascertain the criterion by which to judge the philosophy of religion is to study the revolutions which religion has undergone. Students of History are familiar with one religious revolution. The revolution was concerned with the sphere of religion and the extent of its authority. There was a time when religion had covered the whole field of human knowledge and claimed infallibility for what is taught. History tells us that the Copernican Revolution freed astronomy from the domination of religion. The Darwanian Revolution freed Biology and geology from the trammels of religion. There is no doubt that this religious revolution has been a great blessing. It has established freedom of thought that we do not find in Hindu religion. It has enabled society 'to assume control of itself, making its own the world it once shared with superstition, facing undaunted the things of its former fears, and so craving out for itself, from the realm of mystery in which it lies'.

Thus, it seems to me that Hindu religion in some sense or other was in favour of caste system. It is based on the philosophy of spiritualism which is based on the religious faith that there is a life after death. The soul is immortal and eternal. The birth-rebirth cycle continues on the basis of the fruitfulness of Karma. The Hindu spiritualism, a kind of philosophy, equally believes that there is a divine journey on the basis of which the meaning of life cannot be measured. Just like a materialistic way of life, there is a spiritualistic way of life. The sanctity of such life is based on the purification of the soul. Accordingly, the philosophy of Hinduism states that there is always possibility of uplift one life by way of doing selflessness action. Accordingly, if a Shudra acts according to the philosophy of Hindu religion, there always remains a possibility of becoming higher caste in the nest birth. This is where the relevance of the philosophy of Hinduism actually hinges on.

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