
BLOCK 1 STRUCTURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Unit 1 Hindu Social Order

Unit 2 Caste and Annihilation of Caste

Unit 3 Village

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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 HINDU SOCIAL ORDER

Structure

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Defining the Hindu Social Order
- 1.4 Critique of the Hindu Social Order
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Questions to Check Your Progress

Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand:

- The Hindu social order;
- Critique of the Hindu social order; and
- Ambedkar's Perspective on the Hindu social order.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

We will discuss here about the Hindu Social Order, its critique and Ambedkar's perspective on it. Many social revolutionaries hailing from the marginalized and oppressed sections of Indian society have waged numerous struggles and made untold sacrifices to emancipate the impoverished and oppressed communities in India from the oppressive living realities of the Hindu social order. In this regard, numerous reform movements have helped, enhanced and empowered the oppressed communities in the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious milieu of Indian society. The focus of the social reformers was to generate, propagate and establish an egalitarian mode of thought as an alternative to Brahmanism with a view to empower marginalized groups. There have been many social movements against Brahmanism (the doctrine of unequal social order) in the history of India. The prominent ones were:

- The Charvaka school of thought or Lokayata darshan
- Buddhism in the ancient era
- Kabir, Guru Nanak and other figures of Bhakti movements in medieval period.

In the modern age, the following have played a monumental role in liberating, emancipating and empowering the oppressed sections of Indian society:

- Mahatma Jotirao Phule (Satya Shodak Samaj)
- Shahuji Maharaj

- Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Self Respect movement)
- Sree Narayana Guru (SNDP movement)
- B.R.Ambedkar (Ambedkarism).

B R Ambedkar wrote extensively on Hinduism. The following are his important works on this topic:

- Philosophy of Hinduism¹,
- The Hindu Social Order²
- Symbols of Hinduism³
- The Literature of Brahmanism⁴
- Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses⁵
- The Hindu and his Belief in Caste⁶
- The House the Hindus have built⁷
- Annihilation of Caste⁸
- Castes in India⁹.

1.3 DEFINING THE HINDU SOCIAL ORDER

What is the Hindu social order? Is it a free social order? Is it empathetic towards the grievances of individuals in the society? To answer these questions, we need to know what constitutes a free social order. According to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, there are two fundamental principles of a free social order.

- An individual is an end in himself and the objective of the society is to support the growth of the individual, to develop his personality.
- The relationship between members of society is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Does the Hindu social order recognize these principles? If so, to what extent does the Hindu social order recognize these principles? This question is necessary to comprehend the fundamentals of the Hindu social order and the liberty it permits to the members of the society. Next comes the question of individuality. According to Ambedkar, as the society is based on class or *varna*, the association of an individual to a group is considered paramount. Even the family is not treated as a unit of society except for the purpose of marriage and inheritance. Individual merit and choices are pushed aside and there is no consideration for individual justice. The privileges associated with an individual are not because of his personality; rather these privileges are associated with the group. Similarly, if an individual suffers, it is not necessarily because his conduct deserves it, it is because of the group that he belongs to.

Does the Hindu social order recognize fraternity? According to Hindus, though all men are created by God, they are not created equal. They believe that God created different classes of men from different parts of his divine body. There is a section in “Purusha Sukta” of the *Rig Veda* which says that the Brahman *varna* was born from the mouth

of the God, Kshatriya *varna* from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs and the Shudra from his feet. The Hindus regard the second part (the part that says that men came from different parts of the divine body) as more important and more fundamental than the first (the part that says all men were created by god). The belief that different classes were created from different parts of the divine body has generated another belief that it must be divine that they should remain separate and distinct. Their guiding principle is to be separate; do not inter-marry; do not inter-dine and do not touch. What fraternity can there be in a social order based upon such sentiments? These relations are far from the spirit of fraternity.¹⁰

Does the Hindu social order recognize equality? The answer is certainly negative. According to the social order, all men are children of God but they are not equal. This is because they were created from different parts of the body of God. The Hindu social order refuses to recognize that men are equally as human beings, no matter how profoundly they differ as individuals in capacity and character.¹¹

If the Hindu social order is not based on equality and fraternity, then what are the principles on which it is based? According to Ambedkar, the answer to this question is that it is based on three principles.

- The principle of graded inequality: The four classes are on a vertical plane, not only different but unequal in status, with Brahmin occupying the first rank, Kshatriya occupying the second, Vaishya occupying the third, Shudra being the fourth and below them the Ati-Shudra or Untouchable. This structure among the classes isn't just conventional. It is spiritual, moral and legal.
- The fixed occupations for each class and its continuance by heredity: Manu delegated specific occupations to different classes.
- The fixation of people within their respective classes: It is usual for a society to have different classes. Even a society with free social order will not be able to get rid of classes. But they can be maintained only if the classes are not isolated and exclusive. Such is not the case with the Hindu social order. Manu prohibited social intercourse between different classes of the society. He laid down many rules that ensured fixation of people within their classes.

These are the essential principles on which the Hindu social order is based. Incidentally, there are some strikingly unique features of the Hindu social order that distinguishes it from any other social order in the world.¹²

There are about 429 communities consisting of one-fifth of India's population whose mere touch can cause contamination to Hindus.¹³ Ambedkar in his book *The Hindu Social Order* compares the Brahmins to the Superman and the Shudras to the common man. The Brahman was referred to as the first born, he was the one meant to teach the Vedas and he could not be held guilty for murder.

The Shudras were meant to serve higher varnas, and they were restricted from hearing or uttering the Vedas. Manu denied them even the basic human rights. In the hypothetical world, the Superman feels certain obligation towards the society and helps the common man by using his powers. But in the Hindu society, Brahminical powers were not counterbalanced by their obligation towards the society. These were the primary reasons because of which the Hindu social order cannot be called a free social order.

1.4 CRITIQUE OF THE HINDU SOCIAL ORDER

B.R. Ambedkar endeavored to make India a home for equality, fraternity and liberty. For that purpose he attacked the Hindu religious scriptures from a rationalist and humanist point of view. He felt that caste would be annihilated only if Hindus lost faith in the religious scriptures which sanctify the Varnashrama-dharma and caste system. Ambedkar believed that the dalits should stop cringing in front of the caste-Hindus, pleading for the freedom of praying in their temples or begging to be regarded as a part of Hindu society. He taught the dalits that the only road to dignity and self-respect is not to beg the oppressors for it, but instead challenge them and all that they hold holy.

Ambedkar on Hinduism

Ambedkar has been the biggest critic of the Hindu social order of all the times. The rights of the socially dominant castes (SDCs) were protected but not of those who belong lower castes.¹⁴ He knew that the poor masses must have specific rights otherwise they would be exploited and opposed by the clever and shrewd caste people. According to him the Varna-vyavastha had developed into a social order of exploitation and oppression.

According to Ambedkar, society must be based on reason, and not on atrocious traditions of the caste system. He found education, inter-caste marriage and inter-dine as methods which may eliminate caste and patriarchy. But with time he realized that the Hindu social order had plagued our society to such an extent where even these methods would fail to annihilate caste from the grass root level.¹⁵

Ambedkar, in his book *Philosophy of Hinduism* writes “Hinduism is another name for inequality”. He said:

Religious ideals as forms of divine governance for human society fall into two classes, one in which society is the centre and the other in which the individual is the centre. The same analysis showed that the former the appropriate test of what is good and what is right, i.e. the test of the moral order is Utility while for the latter the test is Justice. Now the reason why the philosophy of Hinduism does not answer the test either of utility or of justice is because the religious ideal of Hinduism for divine governance of human society is an ideal in which the individual is not the centre. The centre of the ideal is neither individual not society. It is a class - the class of Supermen called Brahmins.¹⁶

Ambedkar was a very rational person. He wanted to piously follow a religion that was against any form of oppression, a religion that recognized individuality and did not hinder the development and growth of anyone’s personality, a religion that was established on the basis of liberty, equality and fraternity. He tried to turn Hinduism into such a religion, but gave up after years of enduring the failures in achieving this goal. He suggested strategies for emancipation from oppression. He found the emancipation in Buddhist values, which promote equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believed that Buddha treated women and Shudras with respect and never tried to degrade them like Manu did. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy.¹⁷

1.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit elaborated on Hindu Social Order. The Hindu social order is a ladder of castes placed one above the other, together representing an ascending scale of respect and

descending scale of contempt. As opposed to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, the Hindu social order, according to Ambedkar, is based on the principles of graded inequality, in terms of occupation, lifestyle and social interaction.

Ambedkar tried all his life to make the Hindu society empathetic towards the grievances of the oppressed castes and women. It is the result of his endeavors that many of the lower castes have succeeded in creating a stature for themselves in society, that the society, to a certain extent, has turned empathetic towards them.

1.6 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Describe the Hindu social order.
- 2) Discuss the critique of the Hindu social order.
- 3) Critically analyse Ambedkar's views on Hinduism.

SUGGESTED READINGS

B.R. Ambedkar. "Philosophy of Hinduism" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014.

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Endnotes

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- ² B.R. Ambedkar. "Hindu Social Order" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*. (Reprinted) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 95-129.
- ³ B.R. Ambedkar. "Symbols of Hinduism" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*. (Reprinted) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 130-150.
- ⁴ B.R. Ambedkar. "The Literature of Brahmanism" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*. (Reprinted) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 239-265.
- ⁵ B.R. Ambedkar. "Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 4* (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 5-236.
- ⁶ B.R. Ambedkar. "The Hindu and his Belief in Caste" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 5*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 100-107.
- ⁷ B.R. Ambedkar. "The House the Hindus Have Built" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 4* (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 145-169.

- ⁸ B.R. Ambedkar. “Annihilation of Caste” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 23-27.
- ⁹ B.R. Ambedkar. “Castes in India” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 3-7.
- ¹⁰ B.R. Ambedkar. “Hindu Social Order” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 95-98
- ¹¹ B.R. Ambedkar. “Philosophy of Hinduism” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 3-12
- ¹² B.R. Ambedkar. “Hindu Social Order” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 116 (please check the other references to page numbers)
- ¹³ B.R. Ambedkar. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 7*. Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 265.
- ¹⁴ B.R. Ambedkar. “Philosophy of Hinduism” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 21.
- ¹⁵ B.R. Ambedkar. “Annihilation of Caste” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 24-26.
- ¹⁶ B.R. Ambedkar, “Philosophy of Hinduism” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, (Reprinted). Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014, 32.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/article/dr-b-r-ambedkar%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%84%A2-role-in-women-empowerment-1611-1.html>.

UNIT 2 CASTE AND ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

Structure

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Ambedkar's View on Caste
- 2.4 Annihilation of Caste
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Questions to Check Your Progress

Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand :

- Origin of caste;
- Hindu caste system;
- Ambedkar's view on caste; and
- Annihilation of caste.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Caste system in the Indian society has prevailed for many centuries. It divides all members of society into four hierarchical categories called *varnas*, with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the bottom:

- Brahmins
- Kshatriyas
- Vaishyas
- Shudras

Membership to one's caste is ascribed by birth and one's progeny also by default falls into the same caste category. In this unit we will discuss castes in India their mechanism, genesis, development and annihilation of caste.

2.3 AMBEDKAR'S VIEW ON CASTE

Ambedkar, during his stay at Columbia University, presented a paper in an anthropology seminar of Dr. Goldenweizer. In the paper, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, Ambedkar identifies caste as an important institution. He observes that caste is a complex subject that needs a comprehensive explanation. He contends that before him many subtler minds have attempted to unravel the mysteries of caste, but

unfortunately it still remains in the domain of the “unexplained”, not to say of the “un-understood”. The problem of caste is vast and has been challenged both theoretically and practically.

Ambedkar writes:

As long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders, and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.

Many great scholars have tried to identify the origin of caste. However, Ambedkar did not endorse most of the theories:

- *Senart*: To the French scholar’s statement that the idea of pollution was peculiar to caste, Ambedkar said it was ‘a particular case of the general belief in purity’. For Ambedkar, the idea of pollution could be ignored without affecting the working of castes. The idea was attached to the institution of caste only because the caste that occupied the highest rank was the priestly caste, which was associated with purity.
- *Nesfield*: To Nesfield’s theory highlighting absence of messing with those outside the caste, Ambedkar said that it was mistaking the effect for the cause. Being a self-enclosed unit, caste naturally limits social intercourse, including messing.
- *Sir H Risley*: Ambedkar did not find Risley’s views deserving of a comment.
- *Ketkar*: He agreed with Ketkar, who had defined caste in its relation to a system of castes and had focussed his attention only on those characteristics which were absolutely necessary for the existence of a caste within a system. Ambedkar, however, critiqued Ketkar for taking ‘prohibition of intermarriage and ‘membership by autogeny’ as two characteristics of caste and argued that they were but two aspects of one and the same thing. If intermarriage is prohibited, the membership of those born within the group shall be automatically limited.

Ambedkar further argues that no civilized society other than Indian one practises rituals of the remote past even today. Its religion is essentially primitive, and its tribal code, in spite of the advancement of time and civilization, operates with all its pristine vigour even today. The prevalence of exogamy was well-known in the primitive world. However, with the passage of time and subsequent changes of institutional norms and values, exogamy lost its importance and efficacy, and excepting the nearest blood-kin, there is usually no social bar restricting the field of marriage. But in India the law of exogamy is a positive injunction even today. Indian society still holds on to the clan (*gotras*) system, even though there are no clans, and this can be easily seen from the law of matrimony which centres round the principle of exogamy. It is not that *sapindas* (blood-kin) cannot marry, but a marriage even between *sagotras* (of the same clan) is regarded as a sacrilege.

Ambedkar notes that endogamy is foreign to the Indian people. The various *gotras* of India are and have been exogamous: It is no exaggeration to say that to the people of India, exogamy is a creed and none dare infringe it; so much so that, in spite of endogamy of the castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed, and there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than endogamy. Ambedkar writes:

You will, therefore, readily see that with exogamy as the rule there could be no Caste, for exogamy means fusion. But we have castes; consequently in the final analysis creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on

exogamy. However, in an originally exogamous community, an easy working out of endogamy (which is equivalent to the creation of caste) is a grave problem, and it is in the consideration of the means utilized for the preservation of endogamy against exogamy that we may hope to find the solution of our problem. *Thus the superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste* (Ibid., 9).

Endogamy means creation of caste.

Ambedkar takes the example of an imaginary group that desires to make itself into a caste and analyses what means it will have to adopt to make itself endogamous. If a group desires to make itself endogamous a formal injunction against inter-marriage with outside groups will be of no avail amidst the practice of exogamy already in place. Again, there is a tendency in all groups in close contact with one another to assimilate and amalgamate and thus to consolidate into a homogeneous society. If this tendency is to be strongly counteracted in the interest of caste formation, it is absolutely necessary to circumscribe a circle outside which people should not contract marriages.

Nevertheless, this encircling to prevent inter-caste marriages creates problems from within, of which there is not easy solution. Roughly speaking, in a normal group, the sex ratio is more or less evenly distributed, and generally speaking there is equality between those of the same age. The equality is, however, never quite realized in actual societies. To the group that is desirous of making itself into a caste, the maintenance of equality between the sexes becomes the ultimate goal; without it, endogamy can no longer subsist. In other words, if endogamy is to be preserved, conjugal rights from within have to be provided for; otherwise members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. For the same, the conjugal rights have to be provided for from within. It is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of two sexes within the group desirous of making itself into a caste. It is only through the maintenance of such equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact, and a very large disparity is sure to break it (*Ambedkar: 2014, vol 1. p. 10*).

The problem of caste, then, ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it.

The much needed parity between the units can be realized only when a couple dies simultaneously, which is a rare possibility. The more likely scenarios are:

- The husband may die before the wife and create a *surplus woman*, who must be disposed of; else through intermarriage, she will violate the endogamy of the group.
- The wife may die before her husband and create a *surplus man*; who must be disposed of; else he will marry outside the caste and will break the endogamy.

Thus, both the *surplus man* and the *surplus woman* constitute a threat to the caste for not finding suitable partners within their prescribed circle. They may transgress the boundary, marry outside and *import offspring that is foreign to the caste*.

To get rid of the surplus woman and preserve the endogamy of caste, the group may be likely to resort to two different ways:

- 1) To burn her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. This, however, is rather an impracticable way of solving the problem of sex disparity. In some cases, it may

work; in others, it may not. Consequently, every surplus woman cannot thus be disposed of because it is an easy solution but a hard realization. Therefore, the *surplus woman* (=widow), if not disposed of, remains in the group, but her very existence invites a double danger. She may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the caste. She is therefore a menace in any case, and something must be done to her if she cannot be burned along with her deceased husband.

- 2) To enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. So far as the objective results are concerned, burning is a better solution than enforcing widowhood. Burning the widow eliminates all the three evils that a *surplus woman* is fraught. Being dead and gone, she creates no problem of remarriage either inside or outside the caste. But compulsory widowhood is superior to burning because it is more practicable. Besides being comparatively humane, it also guards against the evils of remarriage as does burning, but it fails to guard the morals of the group. No doubt, under compulsory widowhood, the woman remains, and just because she is deprived of her natural right of being a legitimate wife in future, the incentive to immoral conduct is increased. But this is by no means an insuperable difficulty. She can be degraded to a condition in which she is no longer a source of allurements (*Ibid.*, 11). Thus, the surplus women can be controlled as follow:

Widow burning	Compulsory widowhood
Impractical and hard to implement	Practicable
Inhuman	humane
Eliminates all three evils	
Creates no problem of remarriage outside the caste	The widow may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy
Creates no problem of remarriage inside the caste	The widow may marry within the caste and encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the caste

The problem of the *surplus man* (=widower) is much more difficult than that of the surplus woman in a group that desires to make itself into a caste. From time immemorial, man is a dominant figure in every group. With this traditional superiority of man over woman, his wishes have always been consulted. Contrary to this, woman is given very low status and also made an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions. Such being the case, one cannot accord the same kind of treatment to a *surplus man* as you can to a *surplus woman* in a caste.

The burning of widower with his deceased wife is hazardous in two ways:

- 1) It cannot be done simply because he is a man.
- 2) If done, a sturdy soul is lost to the caste.

There remain two solutions which can help to “conveniently” dispose him of. Although the man is important to the group, endogamy is still more important, and the solution must assure both these ends. Under these circumstances, he may be forced or induced to remain a widower for the rest of his life. This solution is not altogether difficult. For

without any compulsion, some are so disposed as to enjoy self-imposed celibacy or even to take a further step of their own accord and renounce the world and its joys. But given human nature as it is, this solution can hardly be expected to be realized. On the other hand, as is very likely to be the case, if the *surplus man* remains in the group as an active participator in group activities, he is a danger to the morals of the group. From a different point of view, celibacy, though easy in cases where it succeeds, is not so advantageous to the material prospects of the caste. If he observes genuine celibacy and renounces the world, he would not be a menace to the preservation of caste endogamy or caste morals as he undoubtedly would be if he remained a secular person. But as an ascetic celibate, he is as good as burned so far as the material well-being of his caste is concerned. A caste, in order that it may be large enough to afford a vigorous communal life, must be maintained at a certain numerical strength. But to hope for this and to proclaim celibacy is the same as trying to cure atrophy by bleeding.

Imposing celibacy on the *surplus man* in the group, therefore, fails both theoretically and practically. It is in the interest of the caste to keep him as a *grahastha* (one who raises a family), to use a Sanskrit technical term. But the problem is to provide him with a wife from within the caste. At the outset this is not possible. There has to be one man to one woman, and none can have two chances of marriage. For a caste thoroughly self-enclosed, there are always just enough marriageable women to go round for the marriageable men. Under these circumstances the *surplus man* can be provided with a wife only by recruiting a bride from the ranks of those not yet marriageable in order to tie him down to the group. This is certainly the best of the possible solutions in the case of the *surplus man*. By this, he is kept within the caste. By this means, the numerical depletion through constant outflow is guarded against, and by this, endogamy and morals are preserved (*Ibid.*, 13).

It will now be seen that the four means by which numerical disparity between two sexes is conveniently maintained are:

- 1) Burning the widow with her deceased husband;
- 2) Compulsory widowhood—a milder form of burning;
- 3) Imposing celibacy on the widower and
- 4) Wedding him to a girl not yet marriageable.

According to Ambedkar, burning the widow and imposing celibacy on the widower were the means to preserve endogamy.

These means create and perpetuate endogamy, caste and endogamy being one and the same thing. The existence of these means is identical with caste, and caste involves these means. This, according to Ambedkar, is the general mechanism of the caste system.

He further says that caste in India is a very ancient institution, even though there are no authentic records because

the Hindus are so constituted that to them writing history is a folly, for the world is an illusion. (*Ibid.*, 13)

Though institutions may remain unrecorded, they do live for a long time; and customs and morals, like fossils, tell their own history. Ambedkar scrutinizes the solutions the Hindus arrived at to meet the problems of the *surplus man* and *surplus woman*.

In spite of complexity of the working of Hindu society, a superficial observer may present three singular uxorial customs, namely:

- *Sati* or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband.
- Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry.
- Girl marriage.

In addition, one also notes a great hankering after *sannyasa* (renunciation) on the part of the widower, but this may in some cases be due purely to psychic disposition.

While explaining the above points, he comments that there is no scientific explanation on the origin of these customs even today. The philosophy of why these customs have been honoured exists, but the causes of their origin and existence are not understood. He says he does not know why compulsory widowhood was honoured, and even though he had not met anyone who sang in praise of it, there were a great many adhering to it.

Ambedkar also discusses Manu, ancient India's law giver.

Every country has its law-giver who arises as an incarnation (*avatar*) in times of emergency to set right a sinning humanity and to give it the laws of justice and morality. Manu, the law-giver of India, was certainly an audacious person. If the story that he gave the law of caste be credited, then Manu must have been a dare-devil fellow, and the humanity that accepted his dispensation must be quite different from the one we are acquainted with. It is unimaginable that the law of caste was given. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Manu could not have outlived his law, for what is that class that can submit to be degraded to the status of brutes by the pen of a man, and suffer him to raise another class to the pinnacle? Unless he was a tyrant who held all the population in subjection, it cannot be imagined that he could have been allowed to dispense his patronage in this grossly unjust manner, as may be easily seen by a mere glance at his "Institutes". I may seem hard on Manu, but I am sure my force is not strong enough to kill his ghost. Manu lives like a disembodied spirit and is appealed to, and I am afraid will yet live long. One thing I want to impress upon you is that Manu did not give the law of Caste and that he could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophised about it, but certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu Society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of caste dharma. The spread and growth of the caste system is too gigantic a task to be achieved by the power or cunning of an individual or of a class. Similar in argument is the theory that the Brahmins created the caste... The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but the imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle. They may have helped the process by their glib philosophy, but they certainly could not have pushed their scheme beyond their own confines... One can take pleasure and eulogize its furtherance, but cannot further it very far. The vehemence of my attack may seem to be unnecessary; but I can assure you that it is not uncalled for. ...There is a strong belief in the mind of orthodox Hindus that the Hindu Society was somehow moulded into the framework of the caste system, and that it is an organisation consciously created by the *Shastras*. Not only does this belief exist, but it is being justified on the ground that it cannot but be good, because it is ordained by the *Shastras* and the *Shastras* cannot be wrong. I have

urged so much on the adverse side of this attitude, not because the religious sanctity is grounded on scientific basis, nor to help those reformers who are preaching against it. Preaching did not make the caste system; neither will it unmake it. My aim is to show the falsity of the attitude that has exalted religious sanction to the position of a scientific explanation (*Ibid.*, 16).

2.4 ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

The speech Ambedkar had prepared for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore could not be delivered because the Mandal cancelled the conference citing the reason that the views expressed in the speech “would be unbearable to the conference.”

In the speech Ambedkar suggested various steps to annihilate the caste system and reform Hinduism of its discriminations. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he says, annihilation of caste is:

(M)ore difficult than the other national cause, namely *Swaraj*. In the fight for *Swaraj* you fight with the whole nation on your side. In this, you have to fight against the whole nation and that too, your own. But it is more important than *Swaraj*. There is no use of having *Swaraj*, if you cannot defend it. More important than the question of defending *Swaraj* is the question of defending the Hindus under the *Swaraj*. In my opinion only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, *Swaraj* for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery” (Ambedkar 2013:81)

Social Reform versus Political Reform

Ambedkar argues that because of evil customs, Hindu society was not in a state of efficiency and ceaseless efforts must be made to eradicate these evils. Recognising this fact, the birth of the Indian National Congress was accompanied by the foundation of the Social Conference. Just as the Congress was to struggle for political reorganisation of India, the Social Conference would struggle for social reformation of the Hindu society. However this did not sustain for long, and soon the two bodies became two hostile camps. The issue was what takes precedence: social or political reform. After the two forces being evenly balanced for a decade, the fortunes of the Social Conference started ebbing fast.

According to Ambedkar the Social Conference lost the battle due to the kind of social reforms it was advocating. In this connection, it is necessary to make a distinction between social reforms for Hindu families and social reform in the sense of the reorganisation and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The former has relation to widow remarriage, child marriage and so on while the latter relates to the abolition of the caste system.

The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high caste Hindus who did not agitate for the abolition of caste; nor did they have the courage to agitate for the same. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought

centred round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the respect of the breaking-up of the caste system (*Ibid.*, 42)

The Social Reform Party lost because the reformers were indifferent to the reform of the Hindu society.

Ambedkar questioned the political-minded Hindus, citing examples of inhuman treatment of untouchables by upper caste Hindus:

Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large section of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public school? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or ornaments they like? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like?" I can ask a string of such questions but these will suffice... I am sure no sensible man will have the courage to give an affirmative answer. Every Congressman who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class (*Ambedkar*: vol. 1, p. 38).

Ambedkar came to the conclusion that 'the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people' (*Ibid.*, 42).

Fallacy of the Socialist

Ambedkar was critical of the Indian socialists as they ignored the problems arising out of the social order and viewed humans as economic beings. Socialists advocate that man is an economic creature. His activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, and property is the only source of power. They, therefore, preach that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform. However, Ambedkar contested their argument and argued that the social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power and authority. This is made clear by the sway which the Mahatmas have held over the common man. He has cited examples from India and European countries to show how in some instances religion, rather than money, was a source of power (*Ibid.* 44).

He argues that economic reform contemplated by the Socialists cannot come about unless there is a revolution resulting in the seizure of power. That seizure of power must be by a proletariat. Here, Ambedkar raises the question: will the proletariats of India combine to bring about this revolution? Men will not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed (*Ibid.* 46).

Ambedkar believes that the assurance of a socialist leading the revolution that he does not believe in caste is not sufficient. The assurance must proceed from much deeper foundation, namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity. He then puts crucial questions:

- Can it be said that the proletariat of India, poor as it is, recognizes no distinctions except that of rich and the poor?
- Can it be said that the poor in India recognize no distinctions of caste or creed, high or low?

- If the fact is that they do, what unity of front can be expected from such a proletariat in its action against the rich?
- How can there be a revolution if the proletariat cannot present a united front? (*Ibid.* 47).

Ambedkar believed that even if by some freak of fortune a revolution did take place and the Socialists came to power, they would be compelled to deal with the problems created by the social order prevalent in India? Thus, in order to have economic or political reform the monster of caste had to be killed.

Caste as Division of Labour

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar says that some have defended caste in the name of division of labour. According to them, since division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilized society, therefore, there is nothing wrong with the caste system. However, Ambedkar criticized this view on the following grounds:

- 1) The caste system is not merely division of labour; it is also a division of labourers. In Indian society the division of labour is accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments.
- 2) The caste system is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers.
- 3) This division of labour is not spontaneous. It is not based on natural aptitudes. The caste system appoints tasks to individuals in advance, not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on the basis of the social status of the parents. Stratification of occupations on the basis of caste system is positively pernicious. As industry is never static and undergoes rapid and sudden changes, an individual must be free to change his occupation. But the caste system will not allow Hindus to take to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by heredity. By not permitting readjustment of occupations, caste causes much of the unemployment we see in the country.

The division of labour brought about by the caste system is not a division based on choice and individual sentiments. Individual preferences have no place in it. It is based on the dogma of predestination.

Ambedkar raises a pertinent question: “What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men’s hearts nor their minds are in their work?” (*Ibid.* 48). He concludes that as an economic organisation, caste is a harmful institution, because it subordinates man’s natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.

To conclude, although division of labour is a basic characteristic of an industrial organisation, the division of labour generated by the caste system is neither morally acceptable nor desirable.

Hindu Society is a Myth

Ambedkar says that Hindu society is a myth. The word Hindu itself is a foreign name which Mohammedans gave to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves

from them. The Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes and their consciousness is only for their survival. Their level of oneness operates when Hindu-Muslim riots occur. On all other occasions, each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes. "Indeed the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole refusing to have any contact with others." The Hindus lack, to use a sociological term, "*consciousness of kind*". In every Hindu, the consciousness that exist is the consciousness of his caste. Due to this, Hindus fail to form a society or a nation. Many Indians will not admit that they are not a nation but only an amorphous mass of people. They insist that behind the apparent diversity there is a fundamental unity because of habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts.

However, Ambedkar argues that culture spreads by diffusion and that is why one finds similarity between various primitive tribes in the matter of their habits and customs, beliefs, and thoughts, although they do not live in proximity. This doesn't mean the primitive tribes constituted a society.

Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. To have similar things is totally different from possessing things in common. And the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication with one another. This is merely another way of saying that Society continues to exist by communication indeed in communication. To make it concrete, it is not enough if men act in a way which agrees with the acts of others. Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society. For that purpose what is necessary is for a man to share and participate in a common activity so that the same emotions are aroused in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them.

Therefore, caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being (*Ibid.* 50-51).

The effect of caste on the ethics of Hindus, according to Ambedkar, is simply deplorable. He opines that caste has killed public spirit, and public charity and public opinion. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. There is appreciation of virtue but only when the man is a fellow caste-man. On the point of ethics, therefore he puts a crucial question: "Have not Hindus committed treason against their country in the interests of their caste?" (*Ibid.* 56-57).

We have so far discussed Ambedkar's critique of the caste system on the ground of biological reasons and his depiction of the pernicious effect of caste on the ethics of Hindus.

Ambedkar also commented on Hindu religion. He said that the Hindu religion is not a missionary religion. The real question is why did the Hindu religion cease to be a missionary religion? According to Ambedkar, Hindu religion ceased to be a missionary religion when the caste system grew up among the Hindus. Caste is inconsistent with

conversion. The problem is, finding a place and caste for the convert in the social life of the community is difficult. Unlike a club, the membership of a caste is not open to all and sundry. The law of caste confines its membership to persons born in the caste. Castes are autonomous, and there is no authority anywhere to compel a caste to admit a new-comer to its social life. Hindu Society being a collection of castes and each caste being a close corporation there is no place for a convert. Thus it is the caste which has prevented the Hindus from expanding and absorbing other religious communities. So long as caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion and shudhi will be both a folly and a futility (*Ibid.* 54).

Solutions for Casteless Society put forward by Ambedkar

Ambedkar explored various ways to abolish caste.

- *Abolishing sub-castes:* Ambedkar did not favour this view because even if we assume the fusion of sub-castes is possible, there is no guarantee that the abolition of sub-castes will necessarily lead to the abolition of castes. On the contrary, it may happen that the process may stop with the abolition of sub-castes. In that case, the abolition of sub-castes will only help to strengthen the castes and make them more powerful and therefore more harmful..
- *Start Inter-caste dining:* Ambedkar felt this was inadequate because many castes allow inter-dining but that has not destroyed the spirit of caste and the consciousness of caste.
- *Encourage inter-marriage:* Ambedkar believes that fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship becomes paramount, the feeling of being aliens created by caste will not vanish. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste.

Ambedkar observed that it may take ages before a breach in casteism is made.

But whether the doing of the deed takes time or whether it can be done quickly, you must not forget that if you wish to bring about a breach in the system then you have got to apply the dynamite to the *Vedas* and the *Shastras*, which deny any part to reason, and to *Vedas* and *Shastras*, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the religion of the *Shrutis* and the *Smritis*. (*Ibid.* 75).

Ambedkar acknowledges the effectiveness of the inter-caste marriages in abolishing caste. Though they are happening in India, their pace is very slow. Inter-caste marriages must be promoted, popularized and encouraged at individual, social and national level by all castes and communities. The government could provide incentives for such marriages.

2.5 SUMMARY

Ambedkar argued that caste was the product of endogamy superimposed on exogamy in a shared cultural ambience. He claimed that evils such as sati, child marriage and prohibition of widow marriage were the outcomes of the institution of caste. The Brahmins, as an endogamous community, gave rise to the system of caste. Endogamous characteristics of caste also roped in other features such as division and gradation of labourers, prohibition on inter-dining and principle of occupation determined by birth. Ambedkar believes the destruction of the caste system is the only solution to the problem.

Of the numerous steps suggested to annihilate caste in India, inter-caste marriages are the best.

The principal points which Ambedkar made in the essay, summarized by Ambedkar himself, are as follows:

- 1) That caste has ruined the Hindus;
- 2) That the reorganisation of the Hindu society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is impossible;
- 3) That the reorganisation of the Hindu Society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is harmful;
- 4) That the Hindu society must be reorganised on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity;
- 5) That religious sanctity behind Caste and Varna must be destroyed;
- 6) That the sanctity of Caste and Varna can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the Shastras (Ibid., 86).

2.6 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Write an essay on Ambedkar's view of caste?
- 2) How did endogamy play an important role in the caste system?
- 3) Critically examine the different methods to annihilate caste in India.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches. Vol: I, Ambedkar Foundation, New Delhi, 2014.

Majumder: The Human Genetic History of South Asia: A Review.

UNIT 3 VILLAGE

Structure

- 3.1 Objectives
 - 3.2 Introduction
 - 3.3 Defining Village
 - 3.4 Village: Structure and Processes
 - 3.5 Analysing Purity and Pollution of Directions and Wind
 - 3.6 The Political Structure: Necessity of Communalism in Village Panchayats
 - 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
 - 3.8 Questions to Check Your Progress
- Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand:

- The term village in general and specifically in terms of Indian context;
- Foundational sources of structural organisation of Indian villages;
- Locating the various social groups within the structure of village as a system; and
- Comprehensive understanding of the village, including structural-functional, through its critique.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss the village structure of Indian society and different dimensions of social groups, gender, religion, natural resources and politics in a village. “In Primitive Society, man is never found alone. The commonest and therefore the most natural condition of men is to live in groups.” (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 170). The question that arises is whether these groups were just aggregates of people or were they linked to each other in specific relations and bonds; or in other words, did these groups have any social structure or were they just aggregates of people. A further enquiry into this matter brings to fore that “social groupings have taken many forms in the course of history. The family is one such social group which is universal and has survived.”(Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 170) Families developed into clans later.

“...Modern Society differs from a primitive one in two respects. Primitive society consisted of nomadic communities while modern society consists of settled communities. Secondly, primitive society consisted of tribal communities based on blood relationship. Modern society consists of local communities based on territorial affiliation.”(Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 7: 273) The relations of such settled groups shifted from blood relationships in the primitive societies to territorial affiliation in the modern societies.

The differences can be summarized in the following table:

Primitive Society	Modern Society
Nomadic communities	Settled communities
Based on blood relationship	Based on territorial affiliation

A question arises why humans left a nomadic life style and became settled in modern societies. According to Ambedkar, this was because the nature of wealth changed. In the primitive society the main wealth was cattle, however, in the modern societies due to developments made in the tools and techniques of farming, land became the main wealth. "... the earliest form of the wealth held by Primitive Society was cattle. Primitive Society became fixed in its abode, in other words became a settled community, when a new species of wealth was discovered. This new species of wealth was land. This happened when Primitive Society learned the art of farming and of cultivating land. Wealth became fixed at one place when it changed its form from cattle to land. With this change Primitive Society also became settled at the same place."(Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 7: 274).

Based on the above description, one may argue that the process of becoming sedentary along with the widening of group membership and the emergence of territorial affiliation due to land becoming the main wealth may have resulted in the formation of earliest villages. Although the structures and processes of villages have changed over time, the village remains an important part of the country's agrarian mode of production.

Indian society today is still predominately rural, with a majority of population still living in villages. About 68.8 per cent of India's population is rural, living in 6,40,930 villages (Census of India 2011, Primary Census Abstract).

In this unit we will analyse the village as it appears in the writings and speeches of Ambedkar.

3.3 DEFINING VILLAGE

A village has been defined as an organised system of social relationships (Ritzer2005: 16) or as the abstraction from the concrete population and its behaviour - the pattern or network (or 'system') of relationships existing between actors and in their capacity of playing roles to one another (Nadel 1969: 5).

The term originated in late Middle English from Old French whose root was the Latin word *villa* (country house). The Oxford English Dictionary defines a village as "a group of houses and associated buildings, larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, situated in a rural area."According to Scott (1999: 461) the criteria for defining village may vary from state to state, country to country. In his effort he defines village as a small community, larger than a hamlet, but usually rural rather than urban. The Census of India uses the criteria of revenue village which has a definite name and has a surveyed boundary (Census of India 2011) Based on the above characteristics; we define villages as the following:

rural regions marked by the administrative boundaries usually for the purpose of revenue collection and administration consisting of comparatively permanent settlements of households outlined by primary self-governed units majorly based on agrarian mode of production with general expansion of land ownership/cultivation of residents

as the boundary marker including the basic characteristics of community life (extracted from the Census of India 2011).

3.4 VILLAGE: STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Ambedkar in his works enables us to analyse a village comprehensively with reference to the Hindu basis of village organisation and functioning. We will focus on the village structure and its processes in relation to Hinduism as the foundational aspect.

Caste System: The Foundation of Village Organisational Structure

What was Ambedkar's view of a village? Contrary to the glorified and pleasant picture of a village portrayed by the supporters of Hindu social order, Ambedkar saw villages as "cesspools that harboured caste oppression and social and economic backwardness" (Omvedt 2004). In Ambedkar's words:

The Hindu village is a working plant of the Hindu social order. One can see there the Hindu social order in operation in full swing. The average Hindu is always in ecstasy whenever he speaks of the Indian village. He regards it as an ideal form of social organisation to which he believes there is no parallel anywhere in the world. It is claimed to be a special contribution to the theory of social organisation for which India may well be proud of. (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 19).

Ambedkar believed that the Indian villages were a form of ghetto. A ghetto which is well knitted based on the caste system and where the Hindu social order can flourish well. To corroborate this, Ambedkar further argues that Hinduism has Caste imbibed in it as its essential and integral part. Further, every Hindu has a caste. Ambedkar quotes Prof. Max Muller:

Modern Hinduism rests on the system of Caste as on a rock which no arguments can shake (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 3: 336).

Thus, from the above description we may argue that caste system has been the key organisational force behind the structural foundation of villages in India.

Ambedkar cites the travelogue of Alberuni, which describes the Hindu social organisation around 1030 AD. He writes:

The Hindus call their castes varna i.e. colours, and from a genealogical point of view they call them jataka i.e., births. These castes are from the very beginning only four. (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 3: 132-133)

These varnas, hierarchically arranged, starting from the top position were the following:

- Brahmins
- Kshatriyas
- Vaisyas
- Shudras.

Each individual of a particular group was named according to the occupations and modes of life. Moreover, within these social groups, there were several restrictions and prescriptions ordained by religious texts. People of these groups were not allowed to eat together.

Moreover, within a group if there was enmity, they were separated from each other by keeping a board or a piece of cloth. In group dining everyone was forbidden to eat the remains of the meal (Ambedkar2014, Vol. 3: 133)

In addition to the four varnas, there was one more social category called *Antyajas*. Outside the caste category, they provided different kinds of services and were recognised as members practicing specific crafts and professions. This category consisted of the following eight guild members:

- the fuller,
- the shoemaker,
- the juggler,
- the basket and shield maker,
- the sailor,
- the fisherman,
- the hunter of wild animals and of birds,
- the weaver.

This social group lived near the village, inhabited by the above mentioned four castes, but outside it (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 3: 132-133).

Apart from them, there were people like Hadi, Doma (Domba), Candala, and Badhatau (sic) who were considered of no caste group (outcaste) and illegitimate. They were said to be born through fornication of a Shudra man and a Brahmin woman. They were kept engaged in menial and dirty tasks. Some characteristics of this social group were:

- Hadi: They were considered very unclean.
- Doma: They used to play the lute and sing.
- The still lower castes practised killing as a trade and executed punishments after judicial decisions.
- Badhantan: They reportedly ate flesh of dead animals including dogs.

(Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 3: 133)

The villages were geographically sharply divided into two parts: for the touchables and for the untouchables. These parts had no associational relations or proximity between them. The residential areas of the untouchables were stigmatized with caste names like Maharwada, Mangwada, Chamrotti and Khaykana. Only for the purpose of revenue administration or postal communication, such residential areas of untouchables were included in the village belonging to the touchables.

Indian society in general and Indian villages in particular were different from the American or European society where individuals were free to choose their own occupation, residence, wife, political party and so on. The Indian villages were like real corporations from where the untouchables could not escape. This was because their relationship with the society in almost every sense was pre-determined by the social structure of Indian

villages to which the untouchables were made bound to conform (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 259-60). Thus, we may argue that despite the ascribed inferiority and humiliation, the reduction of entity into non-entity, the untouchables were usurped into the traditional oppressive system of village structures, turning the villages into “black holes” for untouchables.

Ambedkar marked a clear differentiation between the untouchables and the outcasts (2014, Vol. 3: 301). He cites Manu to define an outcaste: An outcaste was a person who was excluded by his caste through some kind of formal method. Manu ordered performing funeral rites when a person became an outcast. Hence an outcast was treated as if he were dead. However, there was a clause by which after performing the penance, the outcast was allowed to join the caste group again. Thus while untouchables belonged to the category that was out of the Hindu social order and were the receivers of extreme oppression, stigma and exclusion, the outcast category was formed due to the temporary exclusion of a person from his or her own caste category.

Untouchables: The In-group and Out-group Hatred Receivers

The status of untouchables in the villages was so pathetic that in some regions they were forced to wear a black thread to reduce the chances of a touchable getting polluted even by ignorance (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 141-42). In his third volume of writings and speeches Ambedkar mentions that Manu was of the opinion that the *snataka* should not stay and eat the food given by outcasts. Further, house owners were suggested to keep food on the ground for dogs, outcasts, chandals and the diseased (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 3: 301-302).

Examples of extreme revulsion against untouchables can also be found in the so called culturally developed places. For instance in Dwarka (in the Bombay Presidency), the untouchables were made to clap on the road and shout “Post, Post” for the convenience of the touchables (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 141-42). Similarly in south India the Cherumans of the Madras Presidency were made to stand thirty feet away from the superior caste people. They were not allowed to enter a Brahmin village or temple or tank. They had to make the sound “O, Oh, O” while walking on the roads to beware the people of their polluting presence. Similar customs were found in Cochin, Travancore and Palghat taluka.

The hatred and exclusion imposed upon the untouchables from the in-group (based on same religion) members effected the relations of untouchables with out-group members also. The Government of Bombay in 1928 appointed a Committee to inquire into the grievances of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes. Its report succinctly highlights that despite different religious notions, mode of living and outlook in life, an orthodox Hindu will treat a Muslim, a Christian, a Parsi as touchable but not the members of the depressed classes. This practice further influenced negatively the people of other religions who despite the teachings of their religions, started practicing untouchability (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 138-39).

From the above discussion we may further infer that the inclusion of untouchables into the Hindu social order, including the village as a unit, has remained a false and fake claim. This can be further supported by the restrictions imposed upon their personal life apart from the geographical exclusion. In the words of Ambedkar (2014, Vol. 5: 133-34) untouchables were not authorized to raise themselves above the ascribed status and dignity. They (including untouchable women) were not allowed to wear clean clothes or

ornaments after the fashion of the higher class. They were not allowed to keep tiled roof or construct houses better than touchables. In day-to-day life they were strictly prescribed to stand and salute the touchables, banned to wear silver or gold or even brass or copper ornaments, carry the messages of the deaths to far flung residing relatives of touchables, perform menial and dirty works in the various ceremonies, to live upon the 'jhoothan' leftover food and dead animals (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 133-34).

In the fifth volume of his writings Ambedkar mentioned the incidence of 1935, of Kavitha village situated in Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district, Bombay Presidency. An order was issued by the Bombay Government allowing untouchable children admission in public schools. In bitter opposition to this, the touchables of the village took out their wards from the village public school. The local residents, initially remained quiet for some time, but getting stimulus from another small incident, soon showed their real selves. They attacked the houses of the untouchables, specifically targeting those households that had applied for admission into the public school.

Therefore we may conclude that not only was the inclusion of untouchables into the village structure a false assertion, their exclusion was multidimensional. These exclusionary measures had limitless boundaries and affected the body, soul and conscience of the untouchables.

3.5 ANALYSING PURITY AND POLLUTION OF DIRECTIONS AND WIND

Not only social groups but also the geography and the atmosphere of villages were divided based on the notion of purity and pollution. Because the Hindus consider south as the most polluted direction, the untouchables were strictly ordered to locate their dwellings towards the south (Ambedkar 2014, Vol. 5: 21). The untouchables were prohibited from standing on the side from where the wind was blowing towards a touchable.

If an untouchable abused his "superior", his punishment was disproportionate to the abuse. For example, Manu writes:

If out of arrogance he spits (on a superior) the King shall cause both his lips to be cut off, if he urinates (on him), the penis; if he breaks wind (against him) the anus. (Ambedkar, 2014, Vol. 5: 67).

Moreover, the rites related to outcasts were instructed to be carried out only outside the village boundary, so that the village area may not get polluted (Ambedkar, 2014, Vol. 3: 301). Thus, we can see how, even the division of natural resources of the Hindu villages was oppressive and unjust.

Most villages of India had religious structures of village deities. Ambedkar (2014, Vol. 3: 335) quotes Sir Edward Gait who describes Hinduism as a complex congeries of creeds and doctrines.

It shelters within its portals monotheists, polytheists and pantheists; Worshippers of the great God Siva and Vishnu, or of their female counterparts, as well as worshippers of the divine mothers, of the spirits of trees, rocks and streams and of the tutelary village deities.

3.6 THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE: NECESSITY OF COMMUNALISM IN VILLAGE PANCHAYATS

Ambedkar believed that the question of governing bodies of village was a very important one. The governing bodies play a vital role not only in local self-government but also in facilitating civic use. They also have a large say in issues related to life, liberty and property of the rural population (Ambedkar 2014, Vol.2: 104). Ambedkar was very much against village panchayats and considered them as “the bane of public life of India.” Quoting Mr. R.G. Pradhan, who was one of the members of the committee appointed in 1925 to report upon the working of the village Panchayat Act of 1920, Ambedkar writes that the village system has acted as an agent for fulfilling local particularism with local patriotism. For this reason, he argues – India has never become a united country (Ambedkar, 2014, Vol.2: 106).

While discussing the constitution of the panchayats, he maintained that for depressed classes the provision of adult suffrage was not sufficient, due to minority presence of depressed classes in most villages. Thus, provision of adult suffrage would never result in the conversion of minority into majority. Based on this, Ambedkar pleaded for special representation in the village panchayats for the depressed classes. Thus for the sake of self-representation of all the people, despite accusations, he admitted to the charge of communalism and said that he was “convinced that communalism must be my policy” (Ambedkar, 2014, Vol.2: 107).

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learned the village structure of Indian society. Ambedkar comprehensively understood the structure of Indian villages. Although he probed the structure and functions of the village as a system pertaining to Hindu society, as a trained sociologist, he logically questioned the historically celebrated structural-functional view of Indian villages and revealed the hierarchical, oppressive and exclusionary nature of the Indian village and the social relations within the village system.

Specifically Ambedkar questioned the role of religious texts and sanctions in the development of village organisational structure. He, time and again, proved the caste system as the very basis of Indian village organisation. He smartly revealed the privileged status of Brahmins within these settings and also highlighted the exclusion and illegitimation of various social groups, specifically the untouchables. Due to his training in economics, Ambedkar was able to locate the structural roots of unclean occupations and poverty in the Hindu social order. As a professional economist he exposed how natural resources were divided unequally and in an unjust manner among the people.

Not leaving any loose ends related to the study of village structures of India, Ambedkar affirmed that women were not a monolithic group and women belonging to the untouchable castes were far more oppressed and exploited than others.

He also analysed the political aspects of village as a unit and underlined the necessity of communalism in village panchayats in the form of special representation for the erstwhile excluded communities.

3.8 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Analyse Ambedkar view of village structure of Indian society?
- 2) Discuss the structural roots of poverty existing in Indian villages.
- 3) Underline the importance of communalism as stated by Ambedkar in the village panchayat system.

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UNIT 4 IDEAL SOCIETY

Structure

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Concept of Society and Ambedkar's View
- 4.4 Ambedkar's Notion of Ideal Society
- 4.5 Essential Principles of Ideal Society
- 4.6 Recognising Means to Realise an Ideal Society
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Questions to Check Your Progress

Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand:

- the concept of society as envisioned by Ambedkar;
- Ambedkar's notion of ideal society interwoven with his notion of justice;
- the differences between the Hindu social order and the ideal society propounded by Ambedkar; and
- Ambedkar's notion of equality, liberty and fraternity as key principles of an ideal society.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss Ambedkar's notion of ideal society, the differences between the Hindu social order and ideal society. The life of Bhimrao Ambedkar unfolds a saga of creativity, newness and philosophical arguments. His socio-economic and political ideas make him significant and relevant in different periods of history. His idea of an ideal society reveals his serious and civilized sensibility, deep thinking and wide-ranging vision. He was, above all, a passionate rationalist and radical humanist. His ideal society provided dignity, equality and harmonious life for citizens. Ambedkar's social philosophy of life is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. However, he did not derive this philosophy from the French Revolution, but as he himself claims from the teachings of the Lord Buddha. He writes:

My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.¹

With this philosophy he sought to establish a new egalitarian social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity, values that are reflected in our Constitution, which seeks to secure

justice: social, economic and political. Ambedkar, with his multi-dimensional and versatile personality, a great spirit of sacrifice and a scientific outlook, led and continues to lead movements of self respect throughout India. In 1936 he declared that the model of his ideal society must be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He equated fraternity with democracy and spelt out the nature of an ideal society. Ambedkar observed:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen. ²

With its meaning, fraternity assures the dignity of an individual and the unity and integrity of a nation. Such fraternal relationship is the need of the day not only in India but the world over especially when tensions and chaos prevail in the life of human beings everywhere.

4.3 CONCEPT OF SOCIETY AND AMBEDKAR'S VIEW

Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. We call this ever-changing, complex system society. It is a web of social relationships. And is always changing.³ Society has been defined as a relatively self-sufficient, usually large group of people who maintain direct or indirect contact with each other through a culture.⁴

In other words society is not something tangible. . It does not denote a concrete reality, but refers to social relationships, which become institutionalised, when people relate to each other in well-established and familiar ways.⁵ Let us discuss Ambedkar's views on society.

Ambedkar's Views on Society

Ambedkar's views of society are different from those of others. For example, according to Aristotle, "man is by nature and necessity a social animal. Hence he lives in society. Thus society is quite natural, essential, eternal and universal. It is instrumental in evolving such an atmosphere which would be conducive not only for the satisfaction of his primary wants, but for the development of his personality."⁶ To Ambedkar, society was not an organism as some people hold; it was based mainly on human attitudes. The organisation has certain essentials, which go to make up a real view of society.

He cited examples of Hindu festivals. Different castes observe similar festivals, yet these parallel performances of similar festivals among different castes and groups have not been able to bind them into one integral whole.

For constituting society, what is necessary for a man is to share and participate in a common activity so that the same emotions are aroused in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure, is the real thing that binds men and makes

a society of them.⁷ Thus society is another name for more or less cordial inter-relationship between human beings living in a geographical area.

Ambedkar, as a humanist, did not believe in the superiority of either the social order or the individual. Society exists in the individual and the individual cannot live without society. He believed in an integrated view of man and society. Man apart from man is impossible. In other words, the individual is not superior to society as capitalism holds; nor society is superior to the individual, as communism believes, but society and the individual, to Ambedkar, are inter-dependent.

Hindu Social Order

Ambedkar's vision exposed the unjust and exploitative character of the Hindu religion and social order. He viewed untouchability as an institution of socio-religious oppression, for denial of human rights by the dominant elements. He found the roots of the problem in the structure of the Hindu society which is a by-product of the Hindu four *varna* system. He believed that the untouchable is a by-product of both the *varna* and the caste system, hence there will be untouchables as long as the caste structure exists. Towards the end of his life, Ambedkar had come to believe that nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the system. For many years, he tried to improve the lots of the untouchables through struggles. He argued that "the salvation of the depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel in that he must alter his ways." Further he stated that "I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus."⁸ He listed the following three basic principles on which the existing social order stands:

- The principle of graded inequality, which is a fundamental principle of this order, which divides the society not only horizontally into thousands of castes or sub-castes or communities but also vertically, which is worse.⁹
- Fixity of occupations.¹⁰
- The fixity of people within their respective classes. This means that every person's caste status or class status is decided by birth – not by his or her ability.

In the latter part of his life, Ambedkar studied Buddhism and concluded that the basic character of a religion should be humanism. Essentially, his concept of humanism was about a social order of justice. Justice gives a comprehensive framework to modern society.

4.4 AMBEDKAR'S NOTION OF IDEAL SOCIETY

Most of the writings of Ambedkar were to establish an "ideal society"¹¹ or a "caste less society"¹² or a society grounded on the "principles of justice." The connotation of all these three types of society is almost same: The society must be based on the three principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Further, to understand Ambedkar's vision of a just society it is pertinent to understand the meaning of these three principles. However, let us understand the context in which a need for a just society or ideal society arose in Ambedkar's mind.

Acknowledging the fact that "nowhere is human society one single whole. It is always plural,"¹³ he observed the following about an ideal society:

The questions to be asked in determining what an ideal society are: How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared by the groups? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of associations? Are the forces that separate groups and classes more numerous than the forces that unite? What social significance is attached to this group life?¹⁴

Thus, he contemplates a society which is plural in character, but not static, rigid, traditional and orthodox in behaviour. It would give fair and equal chance to each and everybody for their progress and bind all the people into one common cultural bond. "Ethically" he stated, "all people are heterogeneous. It is the unity of culture that is the basis of homogeneity."¹⁵ The unity of culture obviously could be developed only when the society is based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

4.5 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF AN IDEAL SOCIETY

Ambedkar in his work "Annihilation of Caste," describes his ideal society. He shows how very relevant are in the context of the Indian society which is divided into castes and religious communities. Each caste group tends to create its own distinctive type of like-mindedness, which depends upon the extent of communication and participation. In Ambedkar's words:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts (means communication or what is happening at one part and it should be convey to another part). In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis.¹⁶

Ambedkar, not only suggested the total annihilation of caste or caste-based society, but his starting point was an offering of a model of an ideal society or what he called a 'just society'. For his ideal society, he recognised the following principles:

First, he emphasised "that the individual is an end to himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and the development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary."¹⁷

"The second principle is that the terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity."¹⁸

The third cardinal principle of an ideal society is to have a society based on democratic principles and providing - political, economic and social justice by constitutional measures and by breaking the monopoly of upper strata on political power. In this context on 25th November 1949, Ambedkar said:

(T)here can be no gain saying that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few and the many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey. This monopoly has not merely deprived them of their chance of betterment; it has shaped them of what may be called the significance of the life. These down-trodden people are tired of being governed. They aspire to govern themselves. The urge for self-realization in the down-trodden classes must not be allowed to develop into a class struggle or class war. This can only be done by the establishment of equality and fraternity in all walks of life.¹⁹

One of the key themes of the writings of B.R. Ambedkar was the attainment of social justice and establishment of a just society,²⁰ which, for him, was essentially a casteless society. He not only provided a ruthless criticism of the existing social order but also came up with an alternative vision and alternative model of social order based on justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and annihilation of caste.²¹ Further, to describe the ideal society Ambedkar discusses the meaning of liberty, equality and fraternity in a number of works.

Liberty: According to Ambedkar, liberty includes civil liberty and political liberty. Civil liberty refers to liberty of movement, liberty of speech (which includes liberty of thought, liberty of reading, writing and discussion) and liberty of action. Political liberty consists in the right of the individual to share in the framing of laws and in the making and unmaking of governments.²²

Equality: The nature and manifestation of fundamental characteristics, which appear in all human beings, are summed up in the phrase, 'moral equality'. Therefore, in essence, the phrase 'moral equality' asserts in ethical value, a belief to be sustained and recognition of rights to be respected, because a "society without any response for human personalities is a band of robbers."²³

Fraternity: "Fraternity is another name for fellow feeling. It consists in a sentiment which leads an individual to identify himself with the good of others whereby 'the good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to like any of the physical conditions of our existence.'"²⁴ Fraternity, according to him, is "essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen."²⁵

To achieve equality and justice, he made frantic efforts to get socio-economic safeguards to the down-trodden people and submitted a memorandum to the First Round Table Conference (1930) held in London. The memorandum included several justified and valid points to build a modern and just society. However, he was doubtful about the just society and convinced that mere political equality will not be enough for the welfare of *Shudras* and the marginalised. In fact socio-economic equality was needed for them. Therefore, while participating in the Constituent Assembly debates, he observed:

On 26th 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 principles of one-man one-vote, and one-vote one-value. In our social and economic life, we shall, be reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principles of one-man one-value 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 democracy which this Constituent Assembly has so laboriously built up".

Ambedkar, therefore, to ensure social justice persuaded the Constituent Assembly to incorporate provisions in the Constitution itself. Accordingly, under Articles 14-18, the right to equality, untouchability were been declared an 'offence'.

As a result of his relentless fight for social justice for the down-trodden people, several provisions for protection of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, and minorities were incorporated in the Constitution.

4.6 RECOGNISING MEANS TO REALISE AN IDEAL SOCIETY

It is, however, not impossible to bring into reality the ideal society depicted by Ambedkar. This could be recognised by the following ways.

First, it is necessary to do away with the caste-ridden social order. Ambedkar says that “reason and morality are the two most powerful weapons in armoury of a reformer.”²⁶ They should be put to use. It is necessary “to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras*, and to make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the *Shastras*.”²⁷ Then they would be willingly ready to inter-dine and inter-marry.

Second, Ambedkar suggested accepting the scheme of state-socialism, in which agricultural land and key industries would be nationalised. Neither there would be forced labour nor dependency. State socialism ensures one-man, one-value; as such every individual would lead his life with dignity.

Third, he advocated that the political structure should be such that everyone would be able to get an equal share in power. All the people would enjoy their fundamental rights and fulfill their obligations. Untouchability would be abolished and its practice would be an offence punishable by law.

Fourth, restructuring of the society, socially, economically and politically could be done not by bloody revolution but by constitutional means. He contemplated solving all the problems within in the framework of the Constitution.

In totality, Ambedkar visualised an integrated society in which there is love for all and malice towards none. He prefers Buddhism as an example of ideal society which constitutes the required principles for man to live a good and happy life.

Buddhism: An Example of Ideal Society

Ambedkar thought that Buddhism met the criterion of a religion which has a social vision, scientific outlook, provided solutions to the problems of the deprived millions, upheld equality and individual freedom and emphasised love and compassion. He was interested not only in a casteless religion but in an ideal, scientific religion and society. He found it in Buddhism. In his article “Buddha and the future of his religion” he conceives of religion as a force which governs society through morality. There he states three requirements which a religion should fulfill:

- It must be in accord with science,
- It must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity, and
- It must not sanctify and ennoble poverty.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

The preceding discussion has explained Ambedkar’s notion of justice, just society and ideal society which is based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. It was suggested that Ambedkar’s notion of ideal society was embedded in Buddhism. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that Ambedkar thought Buddhism to be perfectly consistent with modern liberal democratic philosophy. According to Ambedkar:

...democracy was not a form of government: it was essentially a form of society. It may not be necessary for a democratic society to be marked by unity, by community of purpose, by loyalty to public ends and by mutuality of sympathy. But it does unmistakably involve two things. The first is an attitude of mind, an attitude of respect and equality towards their fellows. The second is a social organisation free from rigid social barriers.²⁸

4.8 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) What is ideal society according to Ambedkar?
- 2) Discuss the characteristics of equality, liberty and fraternity?
- 3) Differentiate between Hindu social order and ideal society as propounded by Ambedkar?
- 4) Define the Buddhism as an example of ideal society?

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