



## CASTE SYSTEM AND CHILD LABOUR: DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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The issue related to child labour is a matter of great concern in almost all the nations since time immemorial. The child is a national asset and future resource of the nation. The exploitation of child on the basis of their incapableness is a serious problem. The reason might be the social-political and economic conditions of the particular society. The matter has not been taken seriously by the political leaders, to put an end to.

UNICEF Report 1997, The State of The World's Children, has pointed out that, The rigidity of the caste system in India only dramatizes what is true in most of the world, including the west. The dominant group may not wish its own children to do hazardous labour, but it will not be so concerned if young people from racial, ethnic or economic minorities do it<sup>1</sup>.

Dr. K. Jamanadas observes caste system as a contributing factor to child labour in India just as UNICEF too has made similar studied and put remarks. Further citing magnitude of child labour, it said “ In India, the view has been that some people are born to rule and to work with their minds while others, the vast majority, are born to work with their bodies”<sup>2</sup>.

It is proposed to know how far there is interrelationship between the caste system and child labour in India. The contribution of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar will be taken into account for the eradication of caste system in India.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of the greatest builders of modern India. He was saviour of the down trodden, chief architect of India's Constitution and the greatest pioneer of Buddhist revival in India. The Hindu social system is based on four varnas, brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudras. Hinduism is based on vedas, smritis, puranas and customs, which profess inequality, untouchability, casteism, unreasonable and unscientific beliefs and superstitions. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar being born in an untouchable Mahar community had to suffer a lot.

The contribution of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to eradicate caste system is well known. It is imperative to acquaint with the caste system in India as it is a root cause of poverty and social inequality which leads to the child labour practices. The characteristics features of Hindu society, according to G.S. Ghurye, are as under:

**1] Segmental division of society:** The caste society is not a homogeneous community. Every caste has its own life; the membership is based on birth. The status of a person depends not on his wealth as in the classes of modern Europe, but on the Traditional importance of the caste in which a person is born. Every caste follows its ascribed vocation. Every caste has its elderly body known as Panchayat which deals with caste disputes including family disputes.

**2] Hierarchy:** The castes observe a definite system of social precedence amongst the castes: with Brahmin at the top, followed by Kshatriya, vaishya and shudras and other intermediate castes. The so called untouchables form the fifth place but outside the Varna system.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF REPORT The State of The World's Children, 1997, Published for UNICEF by Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> K.Jamnadas, Caste system contributing factor for child Labour, [www.ambedkar.org/research](http://www.ambedkar.org/research).



**3] Restrictions on feeding and intercourse:** There are certain rules and restrictions on feeding. The food given by Dwija caste only is treated pure and accepted by all. The food from lower castes is not acceptable to the higher castes. There are no social relations among the castes.

**4] Civil and Religious disabilities:** The people in the villages reside in separate localities. The so called untouchable castes live in segregated localities. They cannot take part in social and religious programmes. They have to keep distance from the congregation of the castes Hindus.

**5] Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation:** The castes are bound to perform their hereditary occupations and it is believed that, there lies their salvation only in their caste occupation. Therefore there could not be occupational mobility in the caste society.

**6] Restrictions on Marriage:** Marriages with a person of that particular caste are allowed. In other words there is perfect endogamy among the equals only. Any transgression of this rule is regarded as a breach of caste and religious rule subject to social boycott<sup>3</sup>.

Thus the caste system which has been prevailing in India is based on inequality and most oppressive one. The caste system gave rise to the problems of illiteracy, beggary, malnutrition, disease and contributed to child labour practices in India.

He thought that, the caste system is a destructive ailment and declared to renounce Hinduism. To overcome from this ailment Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, considered the religion which fulfills certain tests of a true religion would be better. Those tests were:

- 1] It should be based on morality
- 2] It must be in accordance with science or religion;
- 3] It must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity; and
- 4] It should not sanctify or ennoble poverty<sup>4</sup>.

He wants the caste barriers be broken down to bring about greater integration amongst all Indians. He however said very categorically that his ideal society would be based on liberty, equality and fraternity<sup>5</sup>. And that meant the eradication of the caste system and its practices, not only by verbal rhetoric we hear from deluded politicians every day, but to erase the caste loyalties from the minds of people, so they can contribute to the betterment of the Indian society as a whole, rather than petty- minded caste-well-being.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great legal philosopher a great jurist. He had privileged of serving the nation in the capacity of a Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, member of the constituent assembly, chairman of the drafting committee and the Law Minister of the Union Government.

In 1942-1946 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as Labour Member, amended the Factories Act, the Indian Mines Act, The Maternity Benefit Act, The Trade Union Act, passed the industrial employment orders. He launched social insurance schemes, promulgated the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund, appointed a Labour Investigation Committee, all this he did

<sup>3</sup> Ghurye G.S.: Caste Race in India, p.g. 2-28, Popular Prakashan (Rep.1988) Bombay

<sup>4</sup> Ahir D.C. (Ed) Dr. Ambedkar on Buddhism p.g. 26-27, Siddharth Publication, People's Education Society, Anand Bhavan Fort Mumbai ( 1982)

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing & Speeches Vol-I p.g 51,57 Government of Maharashtra (1979)

<sup>6</sup> Dr.Ambedkar's Vision of Casteless Society, Shri. Chanan Chahal, President of Federation of Ambedkar and Buddhist Organisation, U.K. p.g.64, Pub.Pravartan Golden Jubilee Commemorative Volume Siddharth College of Arts, Science & Comm.December 2002, Mumbai.



with a view to protect the interest of labourers. The policy has been change since there from and policy advanced for welfare of the labourers women as to men.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as Chairman of Drafting Committee, ensures right against exploitation not only of men and women but also of the children. It includes the provisions under Part III and IV as under:

Article 23- Traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Article 24- No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.

Article 45- Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years.

The state shall endeavours to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.<sup>7</sup>

In fact while framing Article 45 other members of the constituent Assembly were in favour to ensure right to education only up to the primary standard i.e. up to 10 years of age and not up to the age of 14 years He was opposed by several members of the Constituent Assembly, especially G.B.Pant and one member Naziruddin Ahmad who came from West Bengal on the ground that state might not have enough resources to provide universal education up to the age of 14 years. But Dr. Ambedkar brilliantly sabotaged his argument saying on the one hand we are prohibiting child labour up to the age of 14 years and on the other hand we are ensuring right to free, compulsory and universal education up to the age of just 10 years only. Consequently, those who have been rescued from child labour would revert back to child labour if there educational rehabilitation is not ensured up to the age of 14 years. Therefore, in order to strike a logical connection between Article 24 and 45 as obvious corollary we must ensure free, compulsory and universal education up to the age of 14 years.<sup>8</sup>

The other provisions regarding the protection of dignity of the child under constitution are as:

Article 15 (3) - The provision authorizes the State for making any special provision for women and children.

Article 39(e) - That, the health and strength of workers; men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength.

Article 39 (f)- That children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Article 45- Provisions for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years.

The State shall endeavours to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.

Article 51 A ( K) – Who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a man with a mission in his life fought for the

<sup>7</sup> Subs. By the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 for 45- Provision for free and compulsory education for children. The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

<sup>8</sup> His Contribution to constitutionalism and Democracy, by Dr. Vinod Sonkar at Centenary Celebration of Babasaheb's Visit to Columbia University  
Special Issue 6 – June, 2015



eradication of inequality and promotes empowerment of child with securing political, economic and social justice through appropriate political action. To remove the stigma that caste system as a contributing factor to child labour in India we have to take into account the social philosophy of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The caste ideology cannot be eradicated merely by a change of heart still the mindset of the society is not erased. It is true that lower castes community have no sources of income, they are educationally backward and economically poor. It seems that the only remedy lies in their educational development and better job opportunities in addition to poverty amelioration programmes and facilities. The mandate of the constitution for bringing up the child should be viewed as a part of social justice, national integrity and progress, as contemplated by the constitution and hope that we will achieve our goal.