

CHAPTER 26

A WARNING TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

Revolt and rebellion against the Established order is a natural part of the history of the poor in all countries of the world. A student of their history cannot but be struck by the thought entertained by them, of the way victory would come. In the theological age, the poor lived by the hope that spiritual forces would ultimately make the meek inherit the earth. In the secular age, otherwise called modern times, the poor live by the hope that the forces of historical materialism will automatically rob the strong of their strength and make the weak take their place.

In the light of this psychology, when one begins to think of the Untouchables in their role of rebels against the Hindu Social Order one feels like congratulating them on their realization that neither spiritual forces nor historical forces are going to bring the millenium. They know full well that if the Hindu Social Order is to fall to the ground, it can happen only under two conditions. Firstly, the social order must be subjected to constant fire. Secondly, they can't subject it to constant fire unless they are independent of the Hindus in thought and in action. That is why the Untouchables are insistent upon separate electorates and separate settlements.

The Hindus on the other hand are telling the Untouchables to depend upon the Hindus for their emancipation. The Untouchables are told that the general spread of education will make the Hindus act in a rational manner. The Untouchables are told that the constant preaching of reformers against Untouchability is bound to bring about a moral transformation of the Hindus and the quickening of his conscience. The Untouchables should therefore rely on the good will and sense of duty of the Hindus. No Untouchable believes in this facile proposition. If there are any who do, they are hypocrites who are prepared to agree to whatever the Hindus have to say in order that by their grace they may be put in places reserved for the Untouchables. They are a predatory band of Untouchables who are out to feather their nests by any means open to them.

The Untouchables are not deceived by such false propaganda and false hopes. It is therefore unnecessary to comment on it. At the same time, the propaganda is so alluring that it may mislead the unwary Untouchables into being ensnared by it. A warning to the Untouchables is therefore necessary.

Two agencies are generally relied upon by the social idealists for producing social justice. One is reason, the other is religion.

The rationalists who uphold the mission of reason believe that injustice could be eliminated by the increasing power of intelligence. In the mediaeval age social injustice and superstition were intimately related to each other. It was natural for the rationalists to believe that the elimination of superstition must result in the abolition of injustice. This belief was encouraged by the results. Today it has become the creed of the educationists, philosophers, psychologists and social scientists who believe that universal education and the development of printing and press would result in an ideal society, in which every individual would be so enlightened that there would be no place for social injustice.

History, whether Indian or European, gives no unqualified support to this dogma. In Europe, the old traditions and superstitions which seemed to the eighteenth century to be the very root of injustice, have been eliminated. Yet social injustice has been rampant and has been growing ever and anon. In India itself, the whole Brahmin community is educated, man, woman and child. How many Brahmins are free from their belief in untouchability? How many have come forward to undertake a crusade against untouchability? How many are prepared to stand by the side of the Untouchables in their fight against injustice? In short, how many are prepared to make the cause of the Untouchables their own cause? The number will be appallingly small.

Why does reason fail to bring about social justice? The answer is that reason works so long as it does not come into conflict with one's vested interest. Where it comes into conflict with vested interests, it fails. Many Hindus have a vested interest in untouchability. That, vested interest may take the shape of feeling of social superiority or it may take the shape of economic exploitation such as forced labour or cheap labour, the fact remains that Hindus have a vested interest in untouchability. It is only natural that that vested interest should not yield to the dictates of reason. The Untouchables should therefore know that there are limits to what reason can do.

The religious moralists who believe in the efficacy of religion urge that the moral insight which religion plants in man whereby it makes him conscious of the sinfulness of his preoccupation with self and

thereby of the duty to do justice to his fellows. Nobody can deny that this is the function of religion and to some extent religion may succeed in this mission. But here again there are limits to what religion can do. Religion can help to produce justice *within a community*. Religion cannot produce justice *between* communities. At any rate, religion has failed to produce justice between Negroes and Whites, in the United States. It has failed to produce justice between Germans and French and between them and the other nations. The call of nation and the call of community has proved more powerful than the call of religion for justice.

The Untouchables should bear in mind two things. Firstly, that it is futile to expect the Hindu religion to perform the mission of bringing about social justice. Such a task may be performed by Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism. The Hindu religion is itself the embodiment of inequity and injustice to the Untouchables. For it, to preach the gospel of justice is to go against its own being. To hope for this is to hope for a miracle. Secondly, assuming that this was a task which Hinduism was fitted to perform, it would be impossible for it to perform. The social barrier between them and the Hindus is much greater than the barrier between the Hindus and their men. Religion, however efficacious it may be within a community or a nation, is quite powerless to break these barriers and (make)* them one whole.

Apart from these agencies of reason and religion the Untouchables are asked to trust the enlightened self-interests of the Hindu privileged classes and the fraternity of the Hindu proletariat.

As to the privileged classes it be wrong to depend upon for anything more than their agreeing to be benevolent despots. They have their own class interests and they cannot be expected to sacrifice them for general interests or universal values. On the other hand, their constant endeavour is to identify their class interests with general interests and to assume that their privileges are the just payments with which society rewards specially useful and meritorious functions. They are a poor company to the Untouchables as the Untouchables have found in their conflict with the Hindus.

For Untouchables to expect to gain help from the Hindu proletariat is also a vain hope. The appeal of the Indian Communists to the Untouchables for solidarity with the Hindu proletariat is no doubt based on the assumption that the proletariat does not desire advantages for himself which he is not willing to share with others. Is this true ? Even in Europe the proletariat are not a uniform class. It is marked by class composition, the higher and the lower. This is reflected in their attitudes towards social change, the higher are

reformist and the lower are revolutionary. The assumption therefore is not true. So far as India is concerned it is positively false. There is very little for a common front. Socially, there is bound to be antagonism between them. Economically, there cannot be much room for alliance.

What must the Untouchables strive for ? Two things they must strive for is education and spread of knowledge. The power of the privileged classes rests upon lies which are sedulously propagated among the masses. No resistance to power is possible while the sanctioning lies, which justify that power are accepted as valid. While the lie which is the first and the chief line of defence remains unbroken there can be no revolt. Before any injustice, any abuse or oppression can be resisted, the lie upon which it is founded must be unmasked, must be clearly recognized for what it is. This can happen only with education.

The second thing they must strive for is power. It must not be forgotten that there is a real conflict of interests between the Hindus and the Untouchables and that while reason may mitigate the conflict it can never obviate the necessity of such a conflict. What makes one interest dominant over another is power. That being so, power is needed to destroy power. There may be the problem of how to make the use of power ethical, but there can be no question that without power on one side it is not possible to destroy power on the other side. Power is either economic or political. Military power is no power today. Because it is not free power. The economic power of the working class is the power inherent in the strike. The Untouchables as a part of the working class can have no other economic power. As it is, this power is not adequate for the defence of the interests of the working class. It is maimed by legislation and made subject to injunctions, arbitrations, martial law and use of troops. Much more inadequate is the Untouchables' power to strike.

The Untouchable is therefore under an absolute necessity of acquiring political power as much as possible. Having regard to his increasingly inadequate power in social and economic terms the Untouchable can never acquire too much political power. Whatever degree of political power he acquires, it will always be too little having regard to the vast amount of social, economic and political power of the Hindus.

The Untouchable must remember that his political power, no matter how large, will be of no use if he depends for representation in the Legislature on Hindus whose political life is rested in economic and social interests which are directly opposed to those of the Untouchables.

BOOK IV

Religious

One of the schemes of Dr. Ambedkar is “The Conversion of the Untouchables”. This scheme includes the following chapters:

- (1) Hinduism as a Missionary Religion.*
- (2) Christianizing the Untouchables.*
- (3) The Condition of the Convert.*
- (4) The Eternal Verity.*
- (5) The Untouchables and Their Destiny.*

From these essays, Sr. Nos. 2 and 3 have been received from Shri S. S. Rege and Sr. No. 1 has been found in our papers under the title ‘Caste and Conversion’, which was originally published in the Telagu Samachar Special No. of November 1926. One more typed essay entitled “way from the Hindus”, which also deals with religious conversion of the Untouchables, has been found and included in this Book. Rest of the titles mentioned in the above scheme have not been found.—Ed.

