

FOREWORD

The seventh volume of the Writings and Speeches of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar contains two of his most memorable contributions to the sociological literature of the modern India, *viz.* (1) 'Who were the Shudras?- How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society;' and (2) 'The Untouchables- Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?' Both these works have influenced the thinking of the present century which has witnessed emergence of the individual as the autonomous unit in the constitutional jurisprudence of equality and liberty. They mark the inauguration of the age of reason in our history and impress upon us the need to rearrange our social institutions in harmony with the dynamics of technological changes which have made it possible for masses to enjoy freedom. The age of reason was the effect of technologies of freedom and mobility inherent in the Railways, Roads, Telegraphs, mass education movements and greater contacts with the liberal culture of the West.

Both the works have a historical orientation and throw a critical light on the problem of the caste as the inhibitory and controlling element in the social organisation and structure. The defect of the Indian social structure was immobility which was institutionalised as the divine dispensation, leading to decay and atrophy. Dr. Ambedkar examines the problem in the light of historical evidence and shows how the caste became the fundamental criterion of social action.

The work 'Who were the Shudras?' is inscribed to the memory of Mahatma Jotiba Fule whom Dr. Ambedkar esteems "as the greatest Shudra of Modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than

independence from foreign rule.” The history of India is a tally of events of caste-discrimination preached and practised in the name of God. It is fair to conclude in retrospect that the caste as the institution is the survival of pre-jural society and the early jurisprudence of India like the jurisprudence of many other countries, was sustained by the belief in supernatural agencies which punish transgression of usages and can be assuaged by the magic charms and rituals. It is due to the role of religion in the early laws that the priest became the most potent instrument of the stability and the *status quo*. In Europe the priest and the supremacy of the Church was challenged by intellectuals but in India the challenge to the priestly class and the tradition came much later when the British Rule for the first time introduced masses to the democratic values which find expression in the Proclamation of 1858 which states: “And it is our further Will that, so far as may be, our subjects of whatever Race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity to discharge.” In a society of institutionalised gradation and hierarchy, this was a revolution in ideas and ideals of equality which Dr. Ambedkar has advocated in a spirit of social democracy. The present constitutional mandate for equality is traceable to this accident of history which brought with the British rule the philosophy of social change that whatever may be birth-mark, education would qualify an individual for a public office or employment. This was the first blow to the doctrine of the caste followed by the Railways which made the static society mobile. The caste is replaced by the ethics of classification which must be reasonable. Article 14 of the Constitution prohibits class legislation but does not forbid reasonable classification for the purpose of legislation as held by the Supreme Court in *‘Budhan Vs State of Bihar, 1955– Supreme Court 1045.’*

In a sense, ‘Who were the Shudras’ may be said to be an invitation by Dr. Ambedkar to a fresh historical research on this subject to know the reality of human nature which is not harmonious: it has two sides: an aggressive self-assertive side which leads to ignoring the expectations of others in the satisfaction of one’s own expectations and a co-operative social side which leads to working with others in association and groups of all sorts in recognition of common purposes. The individual needs the force of social control to keep these two sides in balance. Undoubtedly, the struggle for existence, the competition in satisfying expectations or desires whenever acute

because of the limited goods of existence, out of which they can be satisfied, disturbs this balance. In order to maintain the balance men have relied upon religion and upon reason.” (Pound - *jurisprudence* Vol. III). For the Indian historical content Dr. Ambedkar shows how the desire for monopoly of social control made the priest the most powerful factor in social control. The caste as a sociological institution resembles a Corporation in which the Board of Directors never changed. It was the law of status which classified men according to their birth and it was fixed and static; ability was not recognised as the means to cross the class-barriers. In theory and in practice the caste is the opposite of liberty, anti-thesis of equality and negation of humanity as it postulates the capacity for thinking incidental to the gift of reason for the chosen few distinguished by the marks of their pedigrees and not by the degrees of excellence evidenced in the free exercise of reason or conscience. The philosophy of the sacred texts in general discouraged the free exercise of reason with the result that the authority of the sacred texts became unquestioned and Truth became a datum and not a problem. This was the cause of intellectual atrophy and social stagnation. One is reminded of the words of Milton :

“Well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion. Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in perpetual succession, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be heretic in the truth and if he believes things only because his Pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.”

It is in this context that the works of Dr. Ambedkar will prove to be a frank assessment and a candid critique of the societal norms requiring revision and reformulation which he himself did when the opportunity presented in the Constituent Assembly which framed the noble Constitution in which fundamental rights protect the individual against despotism whether it comes from the State or Society.

‘The Untouchables’ is a sequel to the work on Shudras. Dr. Ambedkar has in his usual critical style assessed the Indian social system. He is critical of the Indian social system because it did not foster the spirit of critical inquiry. It is, indeed, a matter of regret that Indians could not produce a Voltaire or Milton or Victor Hugo because as a class they did not approve of it. The spirit of inquiry is the *sine-qua-non* of progress. The larger the area of inquiry, the

greater the scope of investigation, the greater are the chances that liberty will thrive and prosper along with tolerance and the existence of dissent. It is in this context that both the works which are brought together in the present volume provide enough material for reflection and action to the layman and will prove to be the source of inspiration to the scholar. The works have to be adjudged in the context in which they were written to shake the average Indian out of his complacency. Today the caste has become irrelevant in the light of modern technological developments. However, social sciences lag behind the technology. It is in this area that our efforts must be concentrated to improve the mind of man, so as to bring it in harmony with the technological progress. Dr. Ambedkar has shown that the caste has become out of place and is a barrier to social progress and individual advancement of freedom. The basic message of his work is that control of minds of men by some powerful individuals is bad as such control retards movement. The best source of practical instruction in the art of life is the opportunity to commit errors and this means responsibility for one's actions and their consequences. That India did not wake to the need to rearrange its social institutions for centuries and it produced Mahatma Fule and Dr. Ambedkar only under the British rule because of its democratic culture of public instruction shows the old truth which has been succinctly expressed by G. B. Shaw in, 'Man, and Superman' that "liberty means responsibility. That's why most men dread it." Modern psychoanalysts and existentialist philosophers have not been able to add to or detract from this statement. In the context of the march of technology, there is a chance of abuse of powers by those in authority and experts or priests of science who control masses by techniques of electronic media. Mind control by mass media and drugs is the awesome reality. Just consider what F. A. Hayek says: (*The Constitution of Liberty*) :

"The day may not be far off when authority by adding appropriate drugs to our water supply or by some other similar device, will be able to elate or depress, stimulate or paralyse, the minds of whole population."

Today the priesthood is replaced by experts and it is a new class or caste that has emerged. The remedy lies in making knowledge free and in widening the frontiers of practical social wisdom. It is in this context that the rationalism of Dr. Ambedkar is relevant to all of us who prize the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

This slightly long Foreword has become necessary to elucidate and emphasise the social context in which they came to be written and with which the post-independence generation of Indians may not be adequately acquainted. The Editorial Board has no doubt that these works will prove to be an invitation to renew our faith in our noble Constitution.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Kadam', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(Kamalkishor Kadam)
Education Minister and
President of the
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
Source Material Publication Committee,
M.S., Bombay.

1

SHUDRAS

WHO WERE THE SHUDRAS ?

*Inscribed to the
Memory of*

MAHATMA JOTIBA FULE
(1827—1890)

*The Greatest Shudra of Modern India who made
the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their
slavery to the higher classes and who preached
the gospel that for India social democracy was
more vital than independence from foreign rule.*

WHO WERE THE SHUDRAS?

*How they came to be the
Fourth Varna in the
Indo-Aryan Society*

By
B. R. Ambedkar

[Reprint of the Edition of 1947]

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