

***INFLUENCE OF EDITORIALS WRITTEN BY GANDHI
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DALITS IN INDIA
AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO***

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Executive Summary

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Influence of Editorials written by Gandhi for the Development of Dalits in India and its relevance in the present scenario.

Gandhi in his Editorials of Harijan and Navjivan did a major campaign against the practice of untouchability, putting pressure on caste Hindus to open up access for Untouchables to public wells, tanks, roads, schools, temples and cremation grounds. In response to Ambedkar he had extended his battle for the untouchables into the civil sphere. But Gandhi insisted that the leadership of the organization should rest on caste Hindus whereas Ambedkar demanded that the leadership be by the Dalits themselves.

Gandhi,s view in Harijan

Gandhi,s view with regard to caste system was really commendable. He wished to see the complete regeneration of humanity, and the revival of Varnadharma. He argues in Harijan "there is utter confusion of Varna as I understand it and I wish that all Hindus be called Shudras where wisdom, power, and wealth will not disappear, but it will be all used for the humanity." He attributed the articulation of untouchability to the distinction between the high and the low that crept into Hinduism, hence corroding it. He was in support of untouchability of a healthy kind since it is a rule of sanitation. So he declared - "the moment untouchability in its present form goes, the caste system itself will be purified, ...it will resolve into the true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other, each is necessary to the whole body of Hinduism as any other."

The weekly Harijan was a medium for him to express his views regarding casteism. It also acted as a platform to share the views of philosophers, leaders etc. It served as a tract in which Gandhi documented his views in future state of India. But in the Poona Pact in 1932 Gandhiji deliberately declined to publish Ambedkar view regarding this concept. Ambedkar was dead against Gandhiji's views on casteism. He was critical of the inherent casteist tendencies of the weekly. He was unhappy with the term Harijan being used to identify the untouchables and argued that he is trying to shift our attention from the curse of untouchability. He added-

“The new name has not elevated the untouchables in the eyes of the Hindus.... Everybody knows that Harijans are simply no other than the old untouchables. The new name provides no escape to the untouchables from the curse of untouchability.”⁵

Harijan also published the views of Rabindranath Tagore which were against Gandhiji's recommendations. He lamented that reducing the seats of the caste Hindus in the central and provincial legislatures in order to accommodate the suppressed classes is a crucial act. He emphasized that it will be a source of perpetual communal jealousy leading to a constant disturbance of peace.

Gandhi –Saviour of Harijans

Gandhi Father of the Nation is greatly remembered because of his views and activities with the intention to bring equality and peace to humanity. Immediately after coming to India after spending twenty years in South Africa he took the side of the “Untouchables” as they were called then. The situations of the untouchables were much pathetic. The Untouchable touched Gandhi's heart, though he belonged to the higher caste. Gandhi went totally against the prevalent norms to change the mindset of untouchables. He did several things to serve as a role model for them. He joined them for the meals, and even cleaned the public toilets along with them. Thus he showed that doing a job that Harijan did, will not make you an untouchable. Amazingly, most of the lower castes wanted to be identified as such because Gandhi made such an impact on them. He was a very influential personality and has done a lot to help the Harijans.

Ambedkar-against Casteism

Ambedkar an untouchable himself was subjected to intense socio-economic discrimination. Though he was educated he faced discrimination on various levels. While practicing law in the Bombay High court he took the mission to uplift the Untouchable by educating them. He believed that only by destroying the caste system could Untouchability be destroyed. He became the main spokesperson for those Untouchables who demanded separate legal and constitutional recognition similar in status to that accorded to the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. To attain

this goal his first attempt was to organize Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha ,to promote education, socio-economic upliftment and the welfare of outcastes. By 1927 he decided to launch active movements against untouchability. He led a Satyagraha in Mahad to fight for the rights of the untouchable community.

Ambedkar against Gandhi,s views:-

Gandhi and Ambedkar the two strong pillars in Indian Freedom struggle and the consequences bequeathed has to be considered in a great deal. Ambedkar the untouchable was heir to an anticaste intellectual tradition that emerged in different parts of India ,when the Buddhists broke with caste by creating sanghas that admitted everybody ,regardless of which caste they belonged to .

Annihilation of Caste an undelivered text by Dr Ambedkar gives an entirely different insight into the situations that prevailed in India with regard to elimination of caste system . Ambedkar,s constitution had a different approach regarding the caste .In his theory of Genesis of castes he stated that Graded inequality ,ban on inter dining ,forced endogamy , restriction on occupation are enumerated as evils of Hindu caste system ,and he claimed that these are absent in the so called Dalit .So he wished that a Bahujan Samaj be formed to include all the sub castes. It is the process of "Samaj jodo" .It can be attributed to the work of Kanshiram in post Ambedkar era . In this the idea of losing identity is also anticipated, here the intention is not to destroy any identity, but an understanding and harmony which would help to maintain and foster any identity to fight the oppressor.

In Navajivan 1921, he describes about caste system as follows, "Caste is another name for control.It puts a limit on enjoyment. It does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as inter-dining and inter-marriage ...These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the Caste System." He always said everything for the untouchables and its opposites also. Here the rivalry between Gandhi and Ambedkar begins.

Sometimes Gandhi said though he believed in the Varna system , a person's varna ought to be decided by their worth not by birth . Ambedkar pointed out the absurdity of this idea provoking the complications hidden in it. It is very clear that Gandhi never decisively and categorically renounced his belief in chaturvarna, the system of four varnas he never agonized over the extremely damaging things he had said or done on caste issues. Ambedkar never finds in Gandhi's view a proactive decision in affirmation against caste system. It is true he is a visionary, a mystic, a moralist, a great humanitarian the man who brought down a mighty empire armed only with truth and righteousness .According to him this structure of moral righteousness rests so comfortably on a foundation of institutionalized injustice .He was deadly against this manifestation of truth which doesn't contribute to the elimination of real issue.

History has been unkind to Ambedkar ,it has hidden his writings ,misinterpreted him, the radical intellect was not recognized in the course of time .His followers have kept his legacy in creative ways . Dalits have used Ambedkar's statue to assert their civil rights –to claim land that is owed by them, water that is theirs, the rights that are denied to. Ambedkar's circumstances forced him to be a revolutionary and at the same time to enter the door of establishment whenever he gets a chance . He was genius enough to act in these capacities equally. Viewed through the prism of the present , it meant that he left behind a dual and sometimes confusing legacy: Ambedkar the radical, and Ambedkar the father of the Indian Constitution .

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were seriously concerned in the development of the Nation, and the fate of the minorities particularly the muslims and untouchables ,but they approached it in different ways. He imposed on Hind Swaraj an entity ,lived in the moral heart of his people ,which he made it clear that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community ie. the Hindus .Contradicting it Ambedkar said for him it is the rule of all the people ,is the rule of justice. Ambedkar,s main concern was to privilege and legalise “constitutional morality” over the traditional ,social morality of the caste system . He emphasized that “constitutional morality” is not a natural sentiment ,it has to be cultivated.

Ambedkar visualizes why in India there is no social revolution as in other countries ? According to him it is due to the wretched caste system. They are compelled to be ploughmen and they are not allowed to turn their ploughshares into swords . They are not promoted for education. They could not think out or know the way to escape ,they are reconciled to eternal servitude ,which they accepted as their inescapable fate. In rural areas the threat of actual physical violence figured as “social boycott “that orthodox Hindus would proclaim against any untouchable who dared to defy the system. The Social Boycott continued to be a weapon against Dalits in Indian villages . It is non –cooperation by the powerful against the powerless. In order to detach caste from the political economy ,from conditions of enslavement in which most Dalits lived and worked ,Hindu reformers cleverly narrowed the question of caste to the issue of untouchability.

Ambedkar realized that the problem of caste would only be further entrenched unless untouchables were able to organize ,mobilize and become a political constituency with their own representatives. He believed that reserved seats for untouchables within the Hindu fold or within congress would only produce pliable candidates-servants who knew to please their masters. So he fought for a separate electorate for untouchables , later it was set apart by the privileged castes . The untouchability of the untouchables puts these rights beyond their reach. In few places they do not even possess such rights as personal liberty and personal security as law is assured to them. These are the interests of the untouchables.

As Gandhi was a strong multifaceted personality nobody was against him in his motivated issues . It created a dormancy to Ambedkar though he was powerful and radical in his approach . His strength vested in a small group who were not brave enough to oppose Gandhi in his innovative ideas and teachings.

Findings :-

1.Gandhi,s editorials definitely played a major role in creating an awareness regarding the discrimination scenario prevalent in the caste system.

2.Sen se of gender equality and caste equality flourished in the society through the editorials.

3.The hidden agenda in the conscience of Gandhi to retain caste system is also clear in his editorials to those who read it with a critical mind.

4.Gandism and Ambedkarism two different concepts in ideologies were prominent in the writings and proposals of these two leaders.

5.The radical Ambedkar vs traditional Gandhi had conflicts in general outlook which in turn affected the society in various aspects.

6.Ambedkar was determined enough to abolish caste system by any means even by the conversion of own religion.For this he motivated Dalits in different terms.

7.Gandhi,the noble ,integrated personality practiced hypocritical means to materialize his views regarding caste system .He wished that caste system should be retained at any cause.

The casteism is still in practice in some rural areas ,which brings to light that inspite of all the radical steps undergone for the last sixty years ,the stipulated criteria that it should be retained provides an atmosphere to silently support the system unknowingly. Anyway we Indians should fight against this discrimination with all strength so that this menial dealings be abolished from our surrounding completely .Our Dream should be an India of equality to all Indians ...no discrimination of caste, gender, status should not be accomplished anywhere.