



Gandhi-Ambedkar's Correspondence: A Study of Abolition of Untouchability and Tolerance of Casteism

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Abstract

The 21st century is the Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar both have different personality and political strategies; Gandhi was soft and calm by nature and Ambedkar was aggressive to saw his approaches. Gandhi and Ambedkar both have fight for the rights against the evil recognitions of the civil society. The old Indian society believe in many customs like yoga, culture, festivals, Epics like *Mahabharata* and its Mythology, Vedic Chanting but this Indian society also followed the untouchability, child marriages, Sati system, Casteism, class discrimination etc. At present time the Indian society is facing the problems like untouchability, Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar was two among the Indian leaders who fought against the societal problems like untouchability. Gandhi and Ambedkar have their own views on untouchability. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar believe in abolition of untouchability, Gandhi believes that the caste system formed for the different services in the society as per the Indian tradition of Varna is concern.

Key Words: *Gandhi and Ambedkar on Abolition of untouchability, Tolerance of Casteism, Correspondence of Gandhi and Ambedkar*

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar were the Indian freedom fighters who served and dedicated their life for the nation and fight for the societal rights. Gandhi and Ambedkar have defined their side and dedication for society; Ambedkar has served his life for nation through building the Constitution of India and Gandhi dedicated his life in freedom struggle of India. Ambedkar has always cared for the *Dalit* people. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar find the challenges in the society like Untouchability, Casteism, Racism, class discrimination, in India. In accordance to article seventeen from Constitution of India (1950), “*Untouchability* is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “*Untouchability*” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.” Still at present time the society is facing the same problems. According to Ambedkar the society divided into two, touchable and untouchables. This practice of discrimination happens in India because of their caste.



Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar were different in their behaviour and attitude; both were against the untouchability but Gandhi was not against the caste system because he believes that each caste has the same value and important for the structure of the society. In accordance to article titled *Casteism in Indian Society* by Adnan Ansari published in legal Service India E-Journal, Casteism is, "...a complex issue with many root causes. One of the main reasons for its existence is the rigid social hierarchy that exists in India. Another reason for Casteism is the lack of social mobility in India. This means that people are born into a particular caste and have little chance of moving up or down the social ladder... Casteism is a form of discrimination that has been present in Indian society for centuries. It is based on the hierarchical divisions of society, which are determined by birth. This system of social stratification means that people are born into a certain caste and remain there for their lives." (Ansari) This caste system affects the Marriages, Jobs, Education, Politics, and Economy. The elimination of the caste system is possible through inter caste bonding and unity, for India to be the 'Golden Sparrow' and the 'Superpower' will must have to omit the problem like untouchability from the society. Ambedkar started the Buddhist Movement in 1956 for Dalits which was the biggest social and political movement in India, this movement rejects the Hinduism and the Caste system. While looking at the present-day situation, in the place called Shorapur in Karnataka state, India, moreover 450 *Dalits* started following Buddhism and rejects the Hinduism because of the reason of Untouchability. One of their leaders Devendra Hegde stated to *The Print* that, "By choosing Buddhism, we're not just rejecting Hinduism which promotes the caste system and inequality but we're also walking in the path of our guru Dr. B.R. Ambedkar..." (Sadam) Also Around 180 Dalit converted to Buddhism in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh in May 2017. (Moudgil)

Methodology

Researcher has done this research through using the discussion between Gandhi and Ambedkar, the letters of Gandhi to Ambedkar, and interview to Ambedkar published in *Harijan*. Researcher has used the MLA 9th edition as a citation style for this research paper. Researcher has selected the correspondence between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi published in *the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958. Researcher did the selection of correspondence is on the basis of Gandhi and Ambedkar's concern of Abolition of Untouchability and Casteism in the society.

Correspondence of Gandhi-Ambedkar

The correspondence between Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar is an exclusive database in the history of India which reflects the tolerance of schedule caste people in India. Gandhi and Ambedkar both fought for the political independence but for Ambedkar the social and economic freedom of depressed class is more



important. Both has that emotional felling for the nation India but for Ambedkar the second priority was the depressed classes of India specially *Dalits*.

“Sevagram, August 6, 1944

.... Untouchability I began to abhor when I was in my teens, but it was a question with me of religious and social reform. And though it has attained a great political importance its religious and social value is for me much greater...” (CWMG, Vol.-84)

Here is the select letter of Gandhi to B. R. Ambedkar written on August 6 1944 in which Gandhi particularly stated about his concern of Untouchability. In this letter, Gandhi stated about his childhood memories in which he feels for the untouchables and also mention about the need of religious and social reform in the society. This is what each great philosophers and good human being experienced in their life on humanitarian ground. Ambedkar’s approach was to removal of evil of untouchability from the Indian society. Here is the correspondence between Gandhi and Ambedkar select from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (1958), published in Volume-57. In these dialogues Ambedkar shared his no interest in the Hindu practices like common dinners and Temple. Ambedkar stated the Hindu mentality in the society on untouchables. His major concern was the end of economic and social inequality.

“... **Ambedkar:** - I must honestly say that I have no interest in the temples being thrown open, common dinners and the like, because we suffer thereby. My people have to put up with beatings and bitterness increases... If the caste Hindus had the strength they would have engaged untouchables as servants. But that has not been so. Hence, I do not feel interested in the thing. I only want that social and economic hardships should end.

Gandhi: - Give examples.

Ambedkar: - The untouchables do not get houses to live in; they continue to suffer injustice and oppression. In one case, an untouchable was accused of having murdered a Maratha...

Gandhi: - I am at one with you... The main thing still remains to be done. I am ready to give my life for it. All the injustices you mention ought to end.

Ambedkar: - ... You wish that temples should be erected or wells should be dug. We might feel that that would be a waste of money that there should be another way out for it...” (CWMG, Vol.-57)

Gandhi expects the example from Ambedkar, in reply to that Ambedkar said the untouchables were facing the problems like shelter, and facing the injustice. Ambedkar also mention about the murder of one of the untouchables by the Maratha. Gandhi was agreed on that to end these crucial tings described by Ambedkar. Ambedkar was also disagreeing with using money in building the temples and digging the wells.

Gandhi and Ambedkar on Untouchability and Casteism



Untouchability and Casteism is the major issue at present scenario. The practices of untouchability suggest the discrimination, exploitation, humanisation, of the lower-class people by the so-called upper class in the society, it also involves the caste system. India is known for its largest democracy of the world which has 15 major languages with more than 150 dialects but it still divided on the basis of particular Caste. Mahatma Gandhi's views on untouchability were published in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.-XIX, that, "... It has been a passion of my life to serve the untouchables because I have felt that I could not remain a Hindu if it was true that untouchability was a part of Hinduism." (Gandhi 289)

"Ambedkar: - But I have only one quarrel with you, that is, you work for the so-called national welfare and not for our interests alone. If you devoted yourself entirely to the welfare of the Depressed Classes, you would then become our hero.

... Gandhi: - ... I have to safeguard without any discrimination not the interest of one group alone but of the Depressed Class as a whole. I want to serve the untouchables... At the moment I have before my eyes the dumb untouchables - unapproachable and unseeables - of South India... I do not like it from the beginning that the community should be divided into two groups. I will raze to the ground the fort of *sanatanists* with dynamite if all the untouchables are one and united. I want that the entire untouchable community should unitedly rebel against the *sanatanists*... Without eradicating untouchability root and branch the honour of Hinduism cannot be saved. That can only happen when untouchables are treated on par with caste Hindus in every respect. A person who is regarded as '*unseeable*' today should also have the opportunity to become the Viceroy of India..." (CWMG, 57), (*Mahadevbhaini Diary* 69-72)

In these dialogues by Gandhi and Ambedkar, Ambedkar suggest Mahatma Gandhi to do work only for the Depressed Classes. Gandhi replied on that with nobility. Gandhi's reply to Ambedkar was in favour of all of the Depressed Class and Gandhi wishes to serve his life for the untouchables. Gandhi mentions about those South India people those who suffer of untouchability. Gandhi stands for the unity; he admits that if he finds the unity in the untouchables than he can destroy the fort of *Sanatanists* with dynamite. Gandhi's this extent level flow of thoughts to Ambedkar has the positive impact on Ambedkar, Gandhi further stated that, when untouchability will abolish from the society then the Hindu religion only can be stable for long period of time. Gandhi also said, the society needs to respect those who are like '*unseeable*' (untouchables) in the society, each untouchable (*Dalits*) has the same respect and the same opportunity to be the Viceroy of India like the other castes people.

Religious Acceptance for Untouchables

Ambedkar is the select dialogues of Gandhi and Ambedkar which suggest the Ambedkar's desire for religious acceptance. In this, Ambedkar question to Gandhi that can Hindu allow the untouchables to do



the rituals of Hinduism like ‘place the flowers on idol’. Gandhi agrees on that to convince Hindus to accept the flowers, sweets anything from depressed community. Gandhi also satire on the rummers that some *Harijans* don’t want comes to the Hindu temple; for Gandhi no matter is person wish to come or not, but for him satisfaction was to just open the door of the Hindu temples for whole society.

“...Ambedkar: - ... Will they let a member of the depressed community place flowers on the idol, or will they let him offer a tray containing oblations...?

Gandhi: - ... Flowers, sweets or any other offerings from *Harijans* will surely be accepted... When some *savarna* Hindus tell me that *Harijans* do not want to enter the temples I ask them to throw open the temple doors for the *Harijans* whether or not they wish to come in. They ought to have the satisfaction that they have done their duty... But I must say that you ought not to say that you are not a Hindu...

Ambedkar: - The Hindu mind does not work in a rational way. They have no objection to the untouchables touching them on the railway and other public places. Why do they object to it only in the case of temples...?” (CWMG, Vol.-59), (*Mahadevbhaini Diary* 117-22)

In this conversation with Gandhi, Ambedkar stated that the Hindus have no problem with *Harijans* (untouchables) at any other places except the Temple. Indeed, the concern of Ambedkar was only to get religious acceptance from the side the Hindus.

Social Acceptance for Untouchables

In the revolt of removal of the untouchability from the Indian society Ambedkar was the orthodox personality who fought to get societal acceptance. In this select correspondence with Gandhi he proclaims to get societal status like others. Ambedkar also criticise the Hindu mentality and of being Hindu. Ambedkar mention that he belongs to law caste family because of that he couldn’t considered as a part of the society’ if he doesn’t get the proper respect from the *savarna* Hindus than Ambedkar wish to left the Hinduism.

“Ambedkar: - ... We want our social status raised in the eyes of the *savarna* Hindus... If I call myself a Hindu, I am obliged to accept that by birth I belong to a low caste. Hence, I think I must ask the Hindus to show me some sacred authority, which would rule out this feeling of lowliness. If it cannot be I should say goodbye to Hinduism... I am not going to be satisfied with measures, which would merely bring some relief... I don't want to be crushed by your charity...” (CWMG, Vol.-59), (*Mahadevbhaini Diary* 117-22)

Ambedkar always desired to have the societal status and respect like others, his belief was to get equality of being human for *Harijans* or *Dalits*.



Conclusion

This research paper suggests the ideas of equality in the society in concert to the caste system and untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi's concern on untouchability from *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.-XIX was that, "The crime against the untouchables I feel, the exploitation of the dumb millions I feel, but I realize still more clearly our duty to the lower animal world. When Buddha carried that lamb on his back and chastised the Brahmins, he showed the highest measure of love. The worship of the cow in Hinduism typifies that love. (Gandhi 395) While have an example of an event organised by Swayam Sainik Dal (SSD) at Ram Katha Maidan, Sector-11, Gandhinagar on April 15, 2023, more than 10,000 (ten-thousands) *Dalits* converted in to the Buddhist. (Dabhi) This is what the societal change in a real and negative manner, unity of the society and humanity is extinct. Gandhi and Ambedkar's correspondence have true and indeed concern of abolition of untouchability from the Indian society. The present-day scenario is not for the tolerance of any but still we have issues like untouchability and Casteism, the present generation will never tolerate this kind of societal issues. Gandhi and Ambedkar were the true thinker who fought for the social, political, educational, economic and religious equality in the society. The concern in correspondence of Gandhi and Ambedkar for the society was the past and while looking at the present-day situation only one question arises, what will be the future of India?

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