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UNDERSTANDING B.R. AMBEDKAR

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By: Rakesh Kumar



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Content

UNDERSTANDING B.R. AMBEDKAR

Question Paper—June-2023 (Solved).....	1
Question Paper—December-2022 (Solved).....	1
Question Paper—Exam Held in July-2022 (Solved).....	1
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved).....	1

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
1.	Caste and Annihilation of Caste.....	1
2.	Village.....	9
3.	Ideal Society.....	16
4.	Emancipation of Untouchables.....	24
5.	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.....	33
6.	Constitutional Means and Social Justice.....	40
7.	Financial Management and the Problem of Rupees.....	50
8.	Critique of Colonial Economy.....	59
9.	Capitalism and State Socialism.....	70
10.	Land and Small Holdings.....	77
11.	Critique of Economic Aspect of Caste.....	87
12.	Labour and Labour Legislation.....	93

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
13.	Ideas of Nation and Nation – Building	102
14.	Democracy and Citizenship.....	111
15.	Federalism and Linguistic States.....	120
16.	Parliamentary Democracy.....	130
17.	Social Democracy.....	138
18.	Future of Democracy.....	147
19.	Constitutional Provisions and the Idea of Representation.....	155
20.	Rights and Representations.....	161

**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
Papers**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

UNDERSTANDING B.R. AMBEDKAR

B.A.B.G.-171

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Answer any five questions.

Q. 1. Write a note on Ambedkar's vision of an ideal society.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 16, 'Ambedkar's Views on Society', Page No. 17, 'Ambedkar's Notion of Ideal Society' and Page No. 18, Q. No. 1.

Q. 2. What do you understand by the term Parliamentary Democracy? Explain.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 130, 'Meaning of Parliamentary Democracy'.

Q. 3. Discuss Ambedkar's views on Indian village.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 10, 'Village: Structure and Processes'.

Q. 4. Discuss the Ambedkar's perspectives on gender.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 34, 'Ambedkar's Perspectives on Gender'.

Q. 5. Discuss the Ambedkar's economic analysis of the caste system.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 87, 'Economic Analysis of the Caste System'.

Q. 6. Analyse the Ambedkar's conception of an alternative system of capitalism and socialism.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 70, 'Capitalism and Alternative Approaches' and Page No. 71, 'Ambedkar's View on State Socialism' and Q. No. 1.

Q. 7. Discuss Ambedkar's concept of Social Democracy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 138, 'Ambedkar's Conception of Social Democracy'.

Q. 8. Who were 'Shudras' according to Ambedkar? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 24, 'Introduction' and Page No. 28, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 3.

■■

QUESTION PAPER

December – 2022

(Solved)

UNDERSTANDING B.R. AMBEDKAR

B.A.B.G.-171

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Answer any five questions.

Q. 1. Analyse Ambedkar's views on Indian village.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 10, 'Village: Structure and Processes'.

Q. 2. Explain Ambedkar's ideas on citizenship.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 112, 'Individual, Society and State: Ambedkar's Perspective', 'Ambedkar's Idea on Democracy and Citizenship'.

Q. 3. What do you understand by the term parliamentary democracy? Explain.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 130, 'Meaning of Parliamentary Democracy'.

Q. 4. Discuss Ambedkar's concept of social democracy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 138, 'Ambedkar's Conception of Social Democracy'.

Q. 5. Write a note on Ambedkar's vision of an ideal society.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 17, 'Ambedkar's Notion of Ideal Society', Page No. 17, 'Recognising Means to Realise an Ideal Society'.

Q. 6. Critically analyse Ambedkar's understanding of untouchability.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 26, 'Untouchability since Independence'.

Q. 7. What is gold exchange standard? How is it different from gold standard?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 53, Q. No. 4.

Q. 8. Analyse Ambedkar's conception of an alternative system of capitalism and socialism.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 70, 'Capitalism and Alternative Approaches', Page No. 71, 'Ambedkar's View on State Socialism', Page No. 71, Q. No. 1.

■ ■

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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UNDERSTANDING B.R. AMBEDKAR

Caste and Annihilation of Caste

1

INTRODUCTION

The Indian society has been dominated by the caste system for several centuries. This system classifies all individuals into four hierarchical categories known as varnas, with Brahmins being at the highest level and Shudras at the lowest: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras. Caste membership is determined at birth and one's offspring is also automatically assigned to the same caste. In this module, we will explore the caste system in India, including its functioning, origins, evolution, and efforts to eradicate it.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

AMBEDKAR'S VIEW ON CASTE

Ambedkar delivered a paper at Columbia University on the subject of Castes in India, recognizing it as a significant institution that requires thorough explanation. He disagreed with most existing theories on the origin of caste and believed that it would continue to prevent social interaction with outsiders and become a global problem if it persisted. He critiqued theories by Senart and Nesfield, but agreed with Ketkar's definition of caste in relation to a system of castes. He argued that prohibition of intermarriage and membership by autogeny are two aspects of the same thing.

Ambedkar argues that Indian society is unique in its practice of rituals from a remote past and that its religion is fundamentally primitive. Exogamy is still prevalent in India, and the clan system is still important, even though there are no clans. Exogamy is considered a creed that must be strictly observed, with more severe punishments for violating it. However, endogamy, or marrying within one's own group, has been superimposed on exogamy, leading to the creation of castes. The preservation of endogamy against exogamy is the means utilized to maintain the caste system.

Endogamy means creation of caste: Ambedkar discusses the challenges of creating a caste by analyzing an imaginary group's desire to make itself endogamous. To establish endogamy, the group must circumscribe a circle beyond which people should not marry. However, this creates problems within the group, such as maintaining equality between the sexes and providing conjugal rights from within to prevent members from leaving. The problem of caste ultimately boils down to repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it. Surplus men and women pose a threat to the caste by potentially marrying outside their prescribed circle and introducing offspring foreign to the caste.

In order to address the issue of surplus women and maintain caste endogamy, two potential solutions may be considered.

The first solution is to burn the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. However, this approach is often impractical and not always effective. While it may work in some cases, it cannot be a universal solution. If a surplus woman is not burned, she may pose a threat to the caste by either marrying outside the caste and violating endogamy or competing for potential marriage prospects within the caste.

The second solution is to enforce compulsory widowhood for the rest of the woman's life. While this approach is not as effective as widow burning in achieving the objective results, it is more practical and humane. Compulsory widowhood prevents the problem of remarriage, but it may increase the likelihood of immoral conduct by the woman since she is deprived of her natural right to be a legitimate wife. However, this issue can be addressed by degrading her to a status where she is not a source of allurements.

Thus, while widow burning eliminates all three problems that a surplus woman creates, it is not a practical solution. On the other hand, compulsory widowhood is a more practical approach, but it may not guard the morals of the group. Ultimately, either

approach may be used to control surplus women within the caste.

The issue of surplus men (widowers) is more complicated than that of surplus women in a group seeking to become a caste. Throughout history, men have been dominant figures in every group, and their desires have always been given priority. In contrast, women have been given low status and subjected to various unjust rules. As a result, a surplus man cannot be treated in the same way as a surplus woman in a caste. Burning a widower with his deceased wife is not feasible for two reasons: firstly, it cannot be done simply because he is a man, and secondly, the caste would lose a strong member if it were carried out.

There are two solutions to dispose of the surplus man in a group that desires to maintain caste endogamy. The first solution is to force or encourage him to remain a widower for the rest of his life, but this is not a practical solution. Self-imposed celibacy is possible, but unlikely. Moreover, if the surplus man remains in the group and participates in group activities, he could be a danger to the group's morals. Celibacy may not be advantageous to the material prospects of the caste because it could result in a decrease in the caste's numerical strength. The second solution is to provide him with a wife from within the caste. However, this is not possible at the outset because there are only enough marriageable women to go around for the marriageable men. The only way to provide a wife to the surplus man is by recruiting a bride from the ranks of those not yet marriageable. This solution keeps the surplus man within the caste and preserves the numerical strength, endogamy, and morals of the caste.

It can be observed that there are four ways to maintain numerical balance between genders within a group:

- Burning the widow with her deceased husband,
- Enforcing widowhood as a milder alternative,
- Forcing celibacy upon widowers, and
- Arranging marriages between a widower and an unmarried girl from the group.

Ambedkar believed that the practice of burning widows and enforcing celibacy on widowers were used to uphold endogamy within the caste system. He also noted that despite a lack of reliable historical records, the caste system was an ancient institution in India. Ambedkar examined the solutions that Hindus adopted to address the issue of surplus men and women, and identified three unusual customs related to marriage: Sati, enforcing widowhood, and child marriage. He also questioned the origin and justification of these customs. Ambedkar discussed the story of Manu, the ancient Indian law-giver, and questioned whether he could have given the law of caste, which is a grossly unjust concept.

Ambedkar argues that Manu did not create the caste system, and it existed long before him. He rejects the idea that the Brahmins created the caste system and believes that it was the result of some law of social growth unique to the Indian people. While sub-divisions of society are natural, the problem with the Indian caste system is that these sub-divisions have become closed and self-enclosed units. Ambedkar suggests that the caste system persists due to the embedded nature of customs like sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage in the Hindu mind, which were imitated by different castes based on their proximity to the Brahmin caste. Ambedkar concludes that imitation is the cause of the formation of caste, and that preaching cannot unmake the caste system.

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

Ambedkar had prepared a speech for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore, in which he proposed several measures to eliminate the caste system and end discrimination in Hinduism. However, the Mandal cancelled the conference, citing the reason that the views expressed in the speech would be intolerable. In his work, 'Annihilation of Caste', Ambedkar argued that the annihilation of caste was a more challenging national cause than the fight for Swaraj, as it required fighting against the entire nation, including one's own people. He emphasized that a casteless society was crucial for the Hindu society to have the strength to defend itself and to achieve Swaraj, as Swaraj would be meaningless without internal strength.

Social Reform versus Political Reform:

Ambedkar contends that Hindu society's inefficiency stems from harmful customs, which must be eradicated through constant efforts. To address this issue, the Indian National Congress was founded alongside the Social Conference, which aimed to reform Hindu society. However, the two groups eventually became hostile towards each other over the priority of social versus political reform. Despite a decade of evenly matched forces, the Social Conference ultimately lost due to its focus on reforming high-caste Hindu families, rather than the reorganization and reconstruction of Hindu society by abolishing the caste system. This distinction is important, as the former concerns issues such as widow remarriage and child marriage, while the latter targets the caste system itself. The Social Conference, primarily composed of enlightened high-caste Hindus, lacked the courage to agitate for caste abolition and instead focused on removing evils that affected them personally. The conflict centred around the reform of the family, rather than the societal reform of caste abolition.

CASTE AND ANNIHILATION OF CASTE/ 3

Ambedkar argued that the Social Reform Party failed because they were only focused on reforming high caste Hindu families and were indifferent towards the larger issue of reforming Hindu society as a whole, particularly the caste system. He questioned the fitness of political-minded Hindus who denied basic rights to the untouchables, such as access to public schools, wells, streets, clothing, and food. He believed that the emancipation of the mind and soul was a crucial step towards political expansion and that no class could rule over another class without such emancipation.

Fallacy of the Socialist: Ambedkar criticized Indian socialists for their narrow focus on economic reform and equalization of property, arguing that an individual's social status can also serve as a source of power and authority. He raised questions about the ability of the Indian proletariat to unite given the prevalence of caste and creed divisions. Ambedkar believed that personal equality and fraternity were necessary for true unity, and the eradication of the caste system was a prerequisite for any economic or political reform.

Caste as Division of Labour: In his work 'Annihilation of Caste', Ambedkar challenges the defense of caste by some who argue that it is necessary for division of labour in society. He argues that this defense is flawed for several reasons. Firstly, the caste system is not just a division of labour, but a division of labourers into separate compartments. This division is hierarchical and graded, which is not found in any other country. Furthermore, the caste system is not based on natural aptitudes, but on the social status of an individual's parents, which restricts an individual's ability to change their occupation. This causes unemployment and hinders individual preferences, as it is based on predestination. Ambedkar raises the question of how efficient a system can be if individuals' hearts and minds are not in their work. He concludes that the caste system is a harmful economic institution that subordinates natural abilities to social rules. Therefore, while division of labour is necessary for industrial organization, the division of labour created by the caste system is neither morally acceptable nor desirable.

Hindu Society is a Myth: According to Ambedkar, Hindu society is a myth and the word Hindu itself was given to natives by Muslims to distinguish themselves. He argues that Hindu society doesn't exist and that it is merely a collection of castes. The only time that Hindus come together is during Hindu-Muslim riots, but otherwise, each caste segregates itself and distinguishes itself from other castes. Ambedkar claims that the Hindus lack a 'consciousness of kind,' and instead, they only have consciousness

of their own caste. Due to this, Hindus fail to form a society or a nation. Ambedkar argues that men can only form a society if they possess things in common, and this can only happen through communication and participation in a common activity. The caste system prevents common activity and thus prevents Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and consciousness.

According to Ambedkar, the impact of caste on the ethics of Hindus is deplorable. He believes that caste has killed public spirit, charity, and opinion among the Hindus. A Hindu's public responsibility and loyalty are limited to their caste. Virtue and morality have become bound to caste. There is no sympathy for the deserving, appreciation of the meritorious, or charity for the needy unless they belong to the same caste. The suffering of those outside their caste calls for no response. The charity, sympathy, and appreciation that do exist are limited to those within their own caste. Ambedkar raises the question of whether Hindus have committed treason against their country in the interests of their caste.

In addition to the critique of the caste system on biological grounds, Ambedkar also commented on Hindu religion. He argues that the Hindu religion is not a missionary religion, and it ceased to be one when the caste system emerged among the Hindus. Caste is inconsistent with conversion because finding a place and caste for the convert in the social life of the community is difficult. Castes are autonomous and restrict their membership to persons born in the caste. Therefore, there is no place for a convert in Hindu society, and the caste has prevented the Hindus from expanding and absorbing other religious communities. As long as caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion, and the practice of shudhi, or purification, will be both futile and foolish.

Solutions for Casteless Society put forward by Ambedkar: Ambedkar proposed different methods to eliminate caste:

Abolishing sub-castes: Ambedkar rejected this approach because getting rid of sub-castes doesn't necessarily mean that castes will disappear. Instead, it may reinforce and empower them, making them more detrimental.

Promoting inter-caste dining: Although Ambedkar recognized the value of inter-caste dining, he thought it was insufficient because it didn't eradicate the caste mindset.

Encouraging inter-marriage: Ambedkar believed that only the blending of blood can create the sense of kinship required to eliminate the feeling of being outsiders created by caste. No other approach would work.

Ambedkar acknowledged that eradicating caste could take a long time, but he stressed that it could only happen if the Vedas and Shastras, which reject reason and morality, were destroyed. He also recognized that inter-caste marriages could be an effective way to abolish caste, but their pace was too slow. Therefore, he suggested promoting and incentivizing inter-caste marriages at the individual, social, and national levels.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Write an essay on Ambedkar's view of caste?

Ans. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's view of caste is that it is a significant institution that requires a thorough explanation. He argued that as long as caste exists in India, Hindus will not intermarry or interact socially with outsiders. He disagreed with most existing theories on the origin of caste, instead favouring Ketkar's definition of caste in its relation to a system of castes and his focus on essential characteristics of a caste within a system. Ambedkar argued that endogamy, or marrying within one's own group, has been superimposed on exogamy, or marrying outside one's own group, to create castes. The preservation of endogamy against exogamy is the means utilized to maintain this system. The problem of caste ultimately boils down to repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it. Achieving the necessary parity between marriageable units is difficult to realize except in rare cases when a couple dies simultaneously. More commonly, either the husband or the wife will die first, creating a surplus man or woman. The surplus woman must be disposed of, or else she will violate endogamy through intermarriage. Similarly, the surplus man must also be disposed of, or he will marry outside the caste and break endogamy. Both surplus individuals pose a threat to the caste by potentially marrying outside their prescribed circle and introducing offspring foreign to the caste. In order to address the issue of surplus women and maintain caste endogamy, two potential solutions may be considered: widow burning or compulsory widowhood. Ambedkar argues that widow burning is not a practical solution, and compulsory widowhood is more practical, but may not guard the morals of the group. Ultimately, either approach may be used to control surplus women within the caste.

Q. 2. How did endogamy play an important role in the caste system?

Ans. Endogamy played an important role in the caste system as it was necessary to maintain the purity of the caste. To achieve endogamy, the caste had to circumscribe a circle beyond which people should not marry. However, this created problems within the

group, such as maintaining equality between the sexes and providing conjugal rights from within to prevent members from leaving. The problem of caste ultimately boiled down to repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it.

In addition, endogamy required the disposal of surplus women and men who could potentially marry outside their prescribed circle and introduce offspring foreign to the caste. To address the issue of surplus women, two potential solutions were considered - burning the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, or enforcing compulsory widowhood for the rest of the woman's life. Similarly, two potential solutions were considered to dispose of surplus men - forcing or encouraging him to remain a widower for the rest of his life, or arranging marriages between a widower and an unmarried girl from the group.

Thus, endogamy played an important role in the caste system as it required strict control over marriages within the caste, which involved the disposal of surplus individuals and the maintenance of numerical balance between genders within the group.

Q. 3. Critically examine the different methods to annihilate caste in India.

Ans. Ambedkar proposed different methods to eliminate caste, but he rejected the approach of abolishing sub-castes as it might reinforce and empower them. He recognized the value of inter-caste dining, but he thought it was insufficient to eradicate the caste mindset. Instead, Ambedkar believed that only the blending of blood through intermarriage can create the sense of kinship required to eliminate the feeling of being outsiders created by caste. He stressed that eradicating caste could only happen if the Vedas and Shastras were destroyed as they reject reason and morality. Although Ambedkar recognized that inter-caste marriages could be an effective way to abolish caste, he suggested promoting and incentivizing them at the individual, social, and national levels as their pace was too slow. Therefore, it can be inferred that Ambedkar's preferred method to annihilate caste was through promoting and incentivizing inter-caste marriages.

OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Q. 1. What were Ambedkar's proposed measures to eliminate the caste system and end discrimination in Hinduism?

Ans. Ambedkar proposed several measures to eliminate the caste system and end discrimination in Hinduism in his speech for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore, which was cancelled. However, he outlined his views in his work, 'Annihilation of Caste.' He argued that the