

A Conspectus of Inequities in Ambedkar's "Grievances of the Scheduled Castes"

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"Grievances of the Scheduled Castes" is a memorandum which was submitted by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the Governor-General of India on 29th October 1942 and first published in 1979 in the first edition of the 10th volume of the book *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, by the Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra. It was later reprinted by Dr. Ambedkar Foundation in January 2014. It was again reprinted a second time by Dr. Ambedkar Foundation in August 2019.

In this memorandum, Ambedkar extensively discourses on the grievances of the Scheduled Castes in British India, the foibles in the various socio-economic sectors which had led to such subjugation of their voice and the measures that the government must take to mitigate their distress. Before delving into the matter it is better to briefly state who the Scheduled Castes are. The Scheduled Castes consist of those people who suffered years of humiliation, indignation, mistreatment and discrimination deriving from a caste system (not racial in any way) that decimates social efficiency and legitimizes Brahminical supremacy. Ambedkar in his undelivered speech *Annihilation of Caste* argues that this caste discrimination, unlike the class discrimination in European civilization, is not only fostered by economic disparities (as the socialists obstinately argue) but also the Hindu religion itself which is the greatest defender of it and Ambedkar claims that the annihilation of caste can only be achieved through the annihilation of Hinduism. We will see that arguments and proposals that he makes in this memorandum for the Scheduled Castes are so rationally and ethically compelling that one may deem them, in terms of Kantian ethics, as "Categorical Imperatives".

Ambedkar divides the listed grievances in the memorandum into three broad categories:

1. Political grievances
2. Educational grievances
3. Other grievances

Along with these categories, he also makes ambitious proposals which are intended for the betterment of the Scheduled Castes and alleviating their tribulations.

The first Political grievance that comes in Ambedkar's enumeration is the lack of representation of the scheduled castes in the central legislature. The central legislative assembly, comprising 141 members – 102 elected and 39 nominated – has only two members hailing from scheduled castes. Ambedkar calls this representation “ridiculously low” (“Grievances” 406). Moreover, this is highly disproportionate to the colossal population of the Scheduled Castes in India which amounted to 40 million in the 1940 census. It should also be noted that the two members of the Scheduled Castes are not elected but nominated and the Scheduled Castes do not a single elected representative in the central legislature. Ambedkar argues that in no way can a community prosper if it does not have a single elected representative in the central legislature. Out of the two nominated members, one is official and the other is non-official and it should be noted that the job of the official nominated member is to look after the interests of the government, not representing the community from which he belongs. Therefore, it boils down to the fact that the 40 million Scheduled Castes have only one member in the legislative assembly to represent them and voice their plights. The other communities like the Hindus have a veritable 54.9 per cent of representation by election, 21 per cent by nomination, which is also disproportionately high compared to their population. Ambedkar argues: “As against this, there is the naked fact that the Scheduled Castes who number 40 million and who form the third largest community in India have no scat by election, and only one by nomination” (“Grievances” 408).

It is clear from these facts that the communal composition of the legislative assembly is highly unbalanced. Moreover, the President of the assembly gives the first chance to speak to those members who belong to a recognized party and if the Scheduled Caste member joins any party he will have to look after the interests of that party rather than his community. He

also has to counter single-handedly an awful lot of anti-Scheduled Caste prejudices of the Hindu members. Ambedkar argues that there is no other way but to augment this derisory representation of the Scheduled Castes in the central legislature.

The second political grievance that Ambedkar points out is the inadequate representation of the Scheduled Castes in the Central Executive. The government of India had been very behindhand in recognizing the rights of the Scheduled Castes in the Central Executive. After the Round Table Conference the political status of the Scheduled Castes was regarded as equal to that of the Muslims and if the Muslims have a right of representation in the Central Executive, so does the Scheduled Caste. At the Round Table Conference, it was a demand of the Scheduled Castes as well as the Muslims to earn the right to representation in the Executive and as it faced no substantial objections from the Hindus, a compromise was made which allowed the important minorities to send representatives in the Executive Cabinet. Although the right was granted, it lost much of its virtue due to the delay, and the inadequacy of the representation of the Scheduled Castes remains. In a cabinet of 15 members, the Scheduled Castes have only 1 representative whereas the Muslims have 3. If the population of both the communities are nearly the same then the Schedules Castes should have if not 3 then at least 2 representatives in the Cabinet. Ambedkar asserts, "As it is, the communal formation of the Cabinet seems to be governed by no principle. The Sikhs who number only million and the Untouchables who number 40 million are placed on the same footing" ("Grievances" 411).

Perhaps the greatest injustice that has been done to the Scheduled Castes lies in the domain of Public Services which are controlled by the Central Government. They include the I. C. S or the Indian Civil Service and the Central Services in which the recruitment happens both locally and on an all-India basis. Ambedkar points out that the communal composition of the Indian Civil Service is highly unbalanced as out of the 1056 men in I. C. S, only one belongs to the Scheduled Castes. In the matter of recruitment in the Central Services, the number of Scheduled Castes is equally derisory. The principle of egalitarian communal representation was recognized by the Government of India in 1925 when it accepted a Resolution, moved into the Central Assembly on 10th March 1923, made by Mr. Nair. In the Resolution he complained that Public Services supervised by the Government were

dominated by Hindus, especially Brahmins and other minority communities found it very difficult to secure a place. In pursuance of this Resolution, the Government reserved one-third of all the vacancies for the minority communities. But, this measure for securing equal communal representation in Public Services did not satiate the non-Hindu communities. This matter was brought up in the Round Table Conference and in 1934 a new Resolution was conceived by the Government for doing justice to all the communities in the sector of Public Services. However, Ambedkar argues this Resolution helped to represent all the other minorities save the Scheduled Castes. The fundamental provisions of the Resolution declared which communities are to be deemed as minorities and defined a fixed proportion of annual vacancies which are to be allotted to the communities declared as minorities. But very strikingly, as Ambedkar notes, this Resolution didn't deem the Scheduled Castes as a minority. It recognized Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Indian-Christians, Sikhs and Parsis but not the Scheduled Castes. Rather, in its attempt to ensure a fair share of representation to the Scheduled Castes in Public Services, it stated that duly qualified members of the Scheduled Caste may be nominated to Public Services by the recruited or appointed officers. Ambedkar astutely points out that this method made the recruitment of the other non-Hindu minorities a matter of obligation but the recruitment of the Scheduled Castes a matter of discretion of the recruited officers. It allotted no reservations at all for the Scheduled Castes.

Ambedkar further points out how important a place for the Scheduled Castes in Public Services is. Trade and Industry being far and almost unattainable careers for the Scheduled Castes, the Government Service is the prime career option and mode to earn a stable livelihood for the youngsters of the Scheduled Castes. Moreover, the endowment of Government patronage can highly encourage education and literacy within a community and the Scheduled Castes must not be deprived of this blessing. The most pivotal advantage that the Scheduled Castes can get through recruitment in Public Services is getting a share of the power of administration. "The Scheduled Castes are more interested in good administration rather than good laws" ("Grievances" 417). Ambedkar argues that good laws are of no use without good administration and by getting appointed in Public Services, the Scheduled Castes can turn an administration, that was always belligerent and unjust to them, to their own favour.

To improve this deplorable condition of the Scheduled Castes in Public Services, Ambedkar offers two proposals. Firstly he proposes that the Government should identify the Scheduled Castes as a minority officially. Secondly, after identifying them as a minority, the Government should entitle them to an adequate share by reserving 13.5 per cent of the annual vacancies in the I. C. S and the Central Services for them. He argues that unless these conditions are accepted justice can never be done to the Scheduled Castes in this field.

Ambedkar further argues that tragically, the only impediment the Scheduled Castes face in fulfilment of their claims is the Government of India itself. After the Poona Pact of 1932, the Hindus can't trammel the claims of the Scheduled Castes as they accepted the Scheduled Castes as a minority and their special entitlement when the Pact was signed. It is the Government of India that opposes their claims for reservation by taking refuge in the excuse that the Scheduled Castes are not educated and qualified enough. Ambedkar severely censures this hypocrisy of the Government which calls itself the trustees for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and calls the excuse put forth by it a fallacious misstatement. A census of Scheduled Caste college students in 1939-40 revealed that there were 400-500 graduates amongst the Scheduled Castes.

This same excuse was put forth in the 1934 Resolution too, and it absolutely discounts the progress made in the next 8 years. For improving the chances of recruitment for the Scheduled Castes, Ambedkar furthers few more proposals like the raising of age bar in I. C. S (which was 24) and reduction in the examination fees of the I. C. S which were too extortionate for the penury-stricken Scheduled Castes.

There is a fourth political grievance that must be mentioned briefly. Ambedkar argues that the Federal Public Service Commission has four members and amongst those four there is not a single member from the Scheduled Castes. There are two Europeans, one Hindu and one Muslim constituting the Commission and the complete absence of the third largest community of India is visible. There is no tenable reason why the Scheduled Castes should suffer this sheer injustice.

After vividly delineating the political grievances, Ambedkar goes on to expatiate the grievances in the field of education. He notes although the education of the Scheduled Castes in Arts and Law is progressing at a steady pace, their knowledge or advancement in science

and technology is abysmal. Pursuing a degree in foreign universities is also a very far cry for them.

Ambedkar argues that it is not enough for the youngsters of the Scheduled Castes to hold ministerial posts only. Their status will not improve no matter how numerous ministerial posts they get unless they hold executive posts as well. Executive posts are equally important for the Scheduled Castes and to obtain them the Scheduled Castes will require much higher and advanced education. Ambedkar argues that an advanced type of education in Science is of more value to the Scheduled Castes than Arts and Law. But, pursuing such education is way beyond their means and the only thing that can aid them is Government assistance. Ambedkar proposes that an annual grant of Rs. 2 lakhs for the scholarship for Scheduled Caste students taking any Science or technical course in any Indian University or Institution offering it should be bestowed and an annual grant of Rs. 1 lakh for the scholarship should be spent on any Scheduled Caste student who seeks to study Science or technology in any foreign university. He further bolsters his claims by citing the examples of Aligarh Muslim University and Benares Hindu University, both of which receive an annual grant of Rs. 3 lakhs from the Government. It is clearly an act of assisting not only the universities but also the respective communities associated with them. If the Government can manage to provide such support to Hindus and Muslims for their education, then there is no reason why it shouldn't do the same for the Scheduled Castes.

The Indian School of Mines which is under the control of the Government provides first-rate technical education in mining, engineering and industry and the students who pass out from there have a chance of securing a career for themselves in the mineral industry. Unfortunately, out of the 97 students registered, there is not a single student belonging to the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar argues that the Government should immediately take some measures to incorporate at least some Scheduled Caste students there. Ambedkar claims that, for this, it won't be a stretch to reserve one-tenth of the seats for the Scheduled Castes.

The Central Advisory Board of Education plays a huge role in directing the actions of the Government on matters of education. It also calls for information and advice regarding educational developments of special interests and values in India. Ambedkar claims that it will be of great help if the Scheduled Castes have a representation in the Board as it will help

in turning the Government's attention to the promotion of education amongst the Scheduled Castes.

In the third and final category of grievances of this memorandum, Ambedkar draws the attention of the readers to the fact that the Scheduled Castes are deprived of publicity. The Government of India spends a lot of resources for the publicity of the sayings and doings of individuals and prominent parties who represent the primal forces working in India. However, the Government has taken no substantial measure for giving publicity to the sayings and doings of the Scheduled Castes. A volume called "India and the Aggressor" (published between 1940 and 1950) is one such collection of the sayings and doings of the political parties and politicians but it absolutely neglects the achievements of the Scheduled Castes. Out of the 940 pages, only 3 pages are devoted to the Scheduled Castes and that too dealt with a trifling issue. This volume portrays the Scheduled Castes as a negligible force in India and Ambedkar severely rebukes it, appealing the Government to give proper publicity to the Scheduled Castes.

A large share of the developmental activities undertaken by the Government for the public is carried out through contracts. The Central Public Works Department holds 1,171 approved contractors but unfortunately, out of these, there is only one contractor hailing from the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar urges the Government to arrange its contract system in such a way that all the communities can make an equal profit out of it. The Government signs the contract with the contractor whose tender is lowest. Ambedkar proposes that "if the tender of a Scheduled Caste contractor is not higher than the lowest 5 per cent, it should be deemed as the lowest" ("Grievances" 436).

In the conclusion of this memorandum, Ambedkar dismally announces, "The policy of the British Government towards the Scheduled Castes has been one of complete and continuous neglect" ("Grievances" 437). In this memorandum Ambedkar sheds light on the grievous condition of the Scheduled Castes in British India, canvassing their grievances and censuring the Government's ignorant and trivializing attitude towards them. The Government's job is not to belittle the benighted but to work for their betterment. It is the duty of the Government to alleviate the plights of the depressed classes. A noteworthy point of this memorandum is that Ambedkar bolsters all his claims and proposals with substantial

arguments and statistical proofs. Perhaps the most striking features of the memorandum are its rationality and pragmatism. Ambedkar refutes the inequities of the Caste system with his immense rational faculty and his proposals are grounded in sheer pragmatism. To support and justify the arguments and grievances, Ambedkar takes the help of his greatest weapon, reason, rather than the Hindu scriptures and it is his immense appetite for reason that makes this memorandum so compelling.

Works Cited

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