Unit 7
Ambedkar and Lohia on Caste

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to explain

◌   Ambedkar's interpretation of the Varna theory

◌   dysfunctional aspects of the caste system

◌   annihilation of caste from the perspective of Ambedkar and Lohia.

7.1   Introduction

Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891- 1956) was a Dalit who assumed the role of social, political, and spiritual leader first for the Dalits and subsequently for the whole nation. He gave the country a democratic constitution; as a spiritual leader he revived the legacy of Buddha. On the other hand, Ram Manohar Lohia (1910-1967) — a socialist by ideology championed the cause of the disadvantaged of India including minorities and women. Ambedkar and Lohia identified the caste system as degenerate in Indian society and wanted to annihilate it. That is why towards the fag end of his life Ambedkar was in touch with Lohia exchanging views through letters. In fact both of them wanted to launch a political party with scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women and minorities at their base constituency.

This unit consists of views of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia on the caste system in Indian society. It starts with a brief introduction to Ambedkar's interpretation of Hindu social order based on the varna theory and goes on to explore his vision on genesis, and spread of caste system. The unit presents the views of Ambedkar on caste consciousness and its dysfunctional aspect. It also deals with the ideas of Ram Manohar Lohia on the dysfunctional aspects of the caste system and his vision to annihilate it.

7.2   Ambedkar on Caste

Ambedkar drew attention to the rigidity of the caste system and its essential features. He argued that the principle of graded inequality as a fundamental principle is beyond controversy. The four classes are not only different but also unequal in status, one stands above the other. In the scheme of Manu, the Brahmin occupies at the uppermost rank followed by the Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Below the Shudra is the Untouchable. This principle regulates many spheres of life. An officer distributing money and/or other relief material to famine-stricken people, for example would give a larger share to a person of high birth than he would to a person of low birth. The Hindu social order does not recognise equal need, equal work or equal ability as the basis of reward for labour. It favors the distribution of the good things of life among those who are reckoned as the highest in the social hierarchy.

The second principle on which the Hindu social order is founded is that of prescribed graded occupations that are inherited from father to son for each class. The third feature of the Hindu social order according to Ambedkar is the confinement of interaction of people to their respective classes. In the Hindu social order there is restriction on inter-dining and inter-marriages between people of different classes. According to Ambedkar there is nothing strange or peculiar that the Hindu social order recognises classes. There are classes everywhere and no society exists without them even a free social order will not be able to get rid of the classes completely. A free social order, however, aims to prevent isolation and exclusiveness because both make the members of the class inimical towards one another (Ambedkar, 1987: 113).

a) Interpretation of Varna Theory

Ambedkar recognised the existence of four varnas in the Hindu social order. He emphasised that the Hindu social order is primarily based on the class or varna and not on individuals. He opined that the unit of Hindu society is not the individual Brahmin, or the individual, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, or the 'Untouchables'. Even the family is not regarded in the Hindu social order as a unit of society except for the purposes of marriage and inheritance. The unit of Hindu society is the class or varna. In the Hindu social order, there is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. If a person has a privilege it is not because it is due to him/her as an individual. The privilege goes with the class, and if he/she is found to enjoy it, it is because he/she belongs to that class. Conversely, an individual suffers not because he/she deserves it by virtue of his/her conduct; rather it is because he/she belongs to that class.

Ambedkar analysed the impact of the division of the society into varnas on the Hindu social order. He argued that because of this division the Hindu social order has failed to uphold liberty, equality and fraternity — the three essentials of a free social order. The Hindus do believe that god created different classes of people from different parts of his divine body. According to Ambedkar, (1987:100) "The doctrine that the different classes were created from different parts of the divine body has generated the belief that it must be divine will that they should remain separate and distinct. It is this belief which has created in the Hindu an instinct to be different, to be separate and to be distinct from the rest of his fellow Hindus". In the same vein Ambedkar adds, "The most extensive and wild manifestation of this sprit of isolation and separation is of course of the caste-system... Originally, there were four only. Today, how many are there? It is estimated that the total is not less than 2000. It must be 3000... Castes are divided into sub-castes." (Ambedkar, 1987: 102)." The question that Ambedkar raised is, "What fraternity can there be in a social order based upon such sentiments?"

Ambedkar asks, 'Does the Hindu Social Order recognise equality?' He says that while the Hindu social order accepts that men have come from the body of the Creator of the Universe, it does not treat them as equal because they were created from the different parts of his body that are themselves graded in terms of perceived importance and location. The Brahmins were created from the mouth, the Kshatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from the feet. Ambedkar agrees that it is a fact that men were not equal in their character and natural endowments, he opined that the Hindu social order, "refuses to recognise that men no matter how profoundly they differ as individuals in capacity and character, are equally

entitled as human beings to consideration and respect and that the well-being of a society is likely to be increased if it plans its organisation that, whether their powers are great or small, all its members may be equally enabled to make the best of such powers as they possess" (Ambedkar, 1987:106). It is for this reason that he feels that the Hindu social order is against the "equalitarian temper" and does not allow equality of circumstances, institutions and lifestyle to develop.

In the same context, Ambedkar upholds that there is absence of liberty specifically 'liberty of action' in the Hindu social order because the occupation and status of the individuals are all fixed on the basis of their birth in a particular family. The same is true for political liberty too. The Hindu social order does not recognise the necessity of a representative government chosen by the people. According to him, though the Hindu social order does recognise that laws must govern the people, it negates the idea that the laws can be made by the representatives chosen by the people. Ambedkar submits that, the Hindus are of the opinion that the law by which people are to be governed already exist in the Vedas and no human being is empowered to bring about a change in the existing laws (Ambedkar, 1987:114).

Reflexion and Action 7.1

Explain Ambedkar's interpretation of the varna theory

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b) **Genesis of Caste System in India**

Ambedkar studied the definitions of caste proposed by Senart, Nesfield, Risley, and Ketkar closely. According to Senart, "a caste is a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary; equipped with a certain traditional and independent organisation, including a chief and a council, meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority and joining together at certain festival: Bound together by common occupation, which relate more particularly to marriage and food and to questions of ceremonial pollution, and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdiction, the extent of which varies, but which succeeds in making the authority of the community more felt by the sanction of a certain penalties and above all by final irrevocable exclusion from the group". Nesfield defines a caste as, "a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community". Ambedkar quotes Risley, according to whom, "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous Community". Finally, Ambedkar took note of Ketkar's definition of caste. According to Ketkar caste is, "a social group having two characteristics— I) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born. II) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group". Reviewing the aforesaid definitions of castes given by different social scientists, Ambedkar emphasises that most scholars have defined caste as an isolated unit.

Ambedkar analyses only those elements from the definitions of castes which he regards peculiar and of universal occurrence. For Senart, the "idea of pollution" was characteristic of caste. Ambedkar refutes this by arguing

that by no means it is peculiar to caste. It usually originates in priestly ceremonialism and in the general belief in purity. Its connection with caste as an essential element may be ruled out because even without it the caste system operates. He concludes that the idea of pollution is associated with caste only because priesthood and purity are old associates and it is the priestly caste, which enjoys the highest rank in the caste hierarchy. Ambedkar identifies the absence of dining with those outside one's own caste as one of the characteristics in Nesfield's definition of caste. He points out that Nesfield had mistaken the effect for the cause. Absence of inter-dining is effect of the caste system and not its cause. Further, Ketkar defines a caste in its relation to a system of castes. Ketkar identified two characteristics of caste, (a) prohibition of inter-marriage and (b) membership by autogeny. Ambedkar argues that these two aspects are not different because if inter-marriage is prohibited, the result is that membership is limited to those born within the group. After critical evaluation of the various characteristics of caste, Ambedkar infers that prohibition or rather the absence of inter-marriage between people of different castes is the only element that can be considered as the critical element of caste. Among the Hindus, castes are endogamous while gotras within a particular caste are exogamous. In spite of the endogamy of the castes, exogamy at the level of gotra is strictly observed. There are more rigorous penalties for those who break the laws of exogamy than those who break the laws of endogamy. It is understandable that exogamy cannot be prescribed at the level of caste, for then caste, as a definite, identifiable unit would cease to exist.

Ambedkar further says that, preventing marriages out of the group creates a problem from within the group, which is not easy to solve. The problem is that the number of individuals of either sex is more or less evenly distributed in a normal group and they are of similar age. If a group desires to consolidate its identity as a caste then it has to maintain a strict balance in the number of persons belonging to either sex. Maintenance of numbers becomes the primary goal because, if a group wants to preserve the practice of endogamy, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between marriageable individuals of the two sexes within the group. Ambedkar (1978: 10) concludes, "The problem of caste, then, ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it." What naturally happens is that there is a 'surplus' of either sex in the society. If a man dies his wife is 'surplus' and if a woman dies her husband is 'surplus'. If the group does not take care of this surplus 'population, it can easily break the law of endogamy. Ambedkar argues that there are two ways in which the problem of 'surplus women' is resolved in society, 'Surplus' women may either be burnt on the funeral pyre of their husbands or strict rules of endogamy may be imposed on them. Since burning of women cannot be encouraged in society, widowhood bringing with it prohibition of re-marriage is imposed on them.

As far as the problem of 'surplus men' is concerned, Ambedkar says that men have dominated the society since centuries and have enjoyed greater prestige than women. The same treatment, therefore, cannot be accorded to them. A widower can remain so for the rest of his life; but given the sexual desire that is natural, he is a threat to the morals of the group particularly if he leads an active social life and not as a recluse. He has to be, therefore, allowed to marry second time with a woman who is not previously married. This is, however, a difficult preposition. If a widower is provided a second woman, then an imbalance in the number women of marriageable age is

created. A 'surplus man' can therefore, be provided wife who has not yet reached marriageable age i.e. a minor girl. Ambedkar identified four means by which numerical disparity between two sexes can be dealt with, burning of widow with her deceased husband; compulsory widowhood; imposition of celibacy on the widower; and wedding of the widower to a girl who has not yet attained marriageable age. In Hindu society, the customs of sati, prohibition of widow remarriage, and marriage of minor girls are practiced. A widower may also observe *sanyasa* (i.e. renounce the world). These practices take care of the maintenance of numerical balance between both the sexes, born out of endogamy.

For Ambedkar, the question of spread and origin of caste are not separated. According to Ambedkar the caste system has either been imposed upon the docile population of India by a lawgiver as a divine dispensation or it has developed according to some law of social growth peculiar to the Indian people. Ambedkar refutes the notion that the law of caste was given by some lawgiver. Manu is considered to be the law- giver of Hindus; but at the outset there is doubt whether he ever existed. Even if he existed, the caste system predates Manu. No doubt Manu upheld it and philosophised about it, but he certainly did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu society. His work ended with the confiscation of existing caste rules and the preaching of caste *dharma* or duties obligations and conduct associated with each caste. Ambedkar rejects the argument that the Brahmin created the caste. He maintains that it was necessary to dismantle this belief because still there is a strong belief in the minds of orthodox Hindus that the Hindu society was moulded into the framework of the caste system and that it is consciously crafted in the shastras. It may be noted that the teaching and preaching of shastras or the sacred texts is the prerogative of the Brahmins.

Ambedkar agrees with the second argument i.e. of some law of social growth peculiar to Indian people about the spread of caste system. According to western scholars, the bases of origin of various castes in India are occupation, survival of tribal organisations, the rise of new belief system, crossbreeding and migration (Ambedkar, 1978:17). The problem, according to Ambedkar, is that the aforesaid nuclei also exist in other societies and are not peculiar to India. Ambedkar asked, "why they did not 'form' caste in other parts of this planet?" At some stage, the priestly class detached itself from rest of the body of people and emerged as a caste by itself. The other classes that were subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation. Some of these classes got divided into bigger groups and some into smaller ones.

According to Ambedkar, "This sub-division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes. The question is: were they compelled to close their doors and become endogamous, or did they close them of their accord? I submit that there is a double line of answer: Some closed their door: Others found it closed against them. The one is a psychological interpretation and the other is mechanistic, but they are complementary" (Ambedkar, 1978: 18). Explaining the psychological interpretation of endogamy, Ambedkar opined that endogamy was popular in the Hindu society. Since it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole –heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous

castes. Ambedkar quotes Gabriel Tarde's law of imitation in this context. According to Tarde, "imitation flows from higher to lower". Secondly, "the intensity of imitation varies inversely in proportion to distance... Distance is understood here in its sociological meaning" (Ambedkar, 1978: 19).

Ambedkar points out that some castes were formed by imitating others because crucial conditions for the formation of castes by imitation existed in the Hindu society. He feels, (i) that the source of imitation must enjoy prestige in the group; and (ii) that there must be "numerous and daily relations" among members of the group. Ambedkar opined that the Brahmin is treated as next to God in Indian society. His prestige is unquestionable and he is the fountainhead of all that is good. He is idolized by scriptures therefore, "Such a creature is worthy of more than mere imitation, but at least of imitation; and if he lives in an endogamous enclosure should not the rest follow his example?" (Ambedkar, 1978:19)

He argues that the imitation of non-Brahmin of those customs which supported the structure of caste in its nascent days until it became embedded in the Hindu mind and persists even today, is testimony to fact that imitation is the cause of formation of caste. The customs of sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage are followed in one way or the other by different castes. Ambedkar opines, "Those castes that are nearest to the Brahmin have imitated all the three customs and insist on the strict observance thereof. Those that are less near have imitated enforced widowhood and girl marriage; others, a little further off, have only girl marriage and those furthest of have imitated only the belief in the case principle"(Ambedkar, 1978: 20).

c) Caste and the Division of Labour

Ambedkar says that the caste system assigns tasks to individuals on the basis of the social status of the parents. Looked at it from another point of view, this stratification of occupations that is the result of the caste system is positively pernicious. Industry is never static. It undergoes rapid and abrupt change. With such changes an individual must be free to change his occupation. Without such freedom to adjust to changing circumstances, it would be impossible for a person to earn a livelihood. Now, the caste system does not allow Hindus to adopt occupations that do not belong to them by heredity. By not permitting readjustment of occupations, caste becomes a cause of much of the unemployment in the country. Furthermore, the caste system is based on the dogma of predestination. Considerations of social efficiency would compel us to recognise that the greatest evil in the industrial system is not so much poverty and the suffering that it involves as the fact that so many peoples have callings that hold no appeal to them. Such callings constantly evoke aversion, ill will and the desire to evade. The occupations that are regarded as degraded by the Hindus such as scavenging evoke aversion for those who are engaged in them. Given the fact that people pursuing such occupations out of some compulsion want to give them up, what efficiency can there be in a system under which neither people's hearts nor their minds are in their work?

d) Socialists and the Caste System

Ambedkar further analyses the steps taken by the socialists to annihilate the caste system through economic development and reforms. Ambedkar questions the wisdom of socialists who professed that acquiring economic power is the only motive by which man is actuated and economic power is the only

kind of power that one can exercise effectively over others. He opined that social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power. He suggests that religion, social status, and property are all sources of power and authority that come into play in different situations. Ambedkar feels that without bringing reform in social order one cannot bring about economic change. He also cautioned the socialists that the proletariat or the poor do not constitute a homogeneous category. They are divided not only on the basis of their economic situation but also on the basis of caste and creed. They cannot, therefore, unite against those who exploit them. According to Ambedkar (1978:48), "It seems to me that other things being equal the only thing that will move one man to take such an action is the feeling that other men with whom he is acting are actuated by feeling of equality and fraternity and above all of justice. Men will not join in a revolution for the equalisation of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed. The assurance must be the assurance proceeding from much deeper foundation, namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity". The elimination of caste through economic reform is not tenable hence socialists would have to deal with hierarchy in a caste first before effecting economic change.

e) Annihilation of Caste

Ambedkar explains that caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire that prevents the Hindus from free social interaction. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind. If someone wants to break the caste system, he/she has to attack the sacredness and divinity of the caste. Ambedkar believed that the real way to annihilate the caste system is "to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras. How do you expect to succeed, if you allow the Shastras to continue to mould the beliefs and opinions of the people? Not to question the authority of the Shastras, to permit the people to believe in their sanctity and their sanctions and to blame them and to criticize them for their acts as being irrational and inhuman is an incongruous way of carrying on social reform. Reformers working for the removal of untouchability including Mahatma Gandhi, do not seem to realise that the acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated upon their minds by the Shastras and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the Shastras on which their conduct is founded" (Ambedkar, 1978: 68).

Ambedkar further added that the caste system has two aspects, it divides men into separate communities; and it places the communities in a graded order one above the other as discussed earlier. The higher the grade of a caste, the greater is the number of religious and social rights. Now, this gradation makes it impossible to organise a common front against the caste system. Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution happened, some of them would lose more prestige and power than others. It is, therefore, not possible to organise a mobilisation of the Hindus.

Can you appeal to reason and ask the Hindus to discard caste as being contrary to reason? Here, Ambedkar quotes Manu "So far as caste and varna are concerned, not only the Shastras do not permit the Hindu to use his reason in the decision of the question, but they have taken care to see that no occasion is left to examine in a rational way the foundations of his belief

in caste and varna"(Ambedkar, 1978: 72). Ambedkar argues that if one wanted to dismantle the caste system then one would have to implement law(s) to change the caste system. He proposes the following reforms within the he Hindu religion in order to dismantle the caste system. (i) There should be one and only one standard book of Hindu Religion, acceptable to all Hindus and recognised by all Hindus; (ii) it would be appropriate if priesthood among Hindus was abolished, failing which the priesthood should at least cease to be hereditary. Every person who professes to be a Hindu must be eligible for the position of a priest. Law should ensure that no Hindu performs rituals as a priest unless he has passed an examination prescribed by the state and holds a permission from the state to practice; (iii) no ceremony performed by a priest who does not hold the permission would be deemed to be valid in law, and a person who officiates as priest without the permission should be personalised; (iv) a priest should be the servant of the state and should be subject to the disciplinary action by the state in the matter of his morals, beliefs; and (v) the number of priests should be limited by law according to the requirements of the state. These, according to Ambedkar, would provide the basis for the establishment of a new social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, with democracy.

Having analysed the exploitative nature of Hindu social order born out of varnas, castes and sub-castes, Ambedkar gives his own vision of an ideal social order. He looked forward to a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Fraternity creates more channels for association and sharing experiences. This helps in establishing an attitude of respect and reverence among the individuals towards fellowmen. For Ambedkar, liberty benefits the people by giving them freedom of choice of occupation. Lastly, it is a fact that all men are not equal in terms of their physical and economic endowment people alike these elements were absent in a caste-ridden society.

7.3   Ram Manohar Lohia on Caste

Ram Manohar Lohia believed that caste system is directly related with the division of labour. According to him caste system will exist in one form or the other wherever there is hereditary production though on a small-scale. Further, he said that whenever there is centralisation of land or when landowning classes hold power, there would be Kshatriya varna. Wherever there is priestly class for the assistance of Kshatriya, there will be Brahmin varna. Wherever there is agriculture, and exchange, there will be Vaishya varna, and wherever the branches of production are developed in special form of branches of artisans, there will exist a Shudra varna.

The development of caste system is related with the development of craft knowledge. Brahman is a varna, but the varna in itself does not connote an occupation. This is also true of the Kshatriya and Vaishya varna. Vaishyas, for example, can be traders, agriculturists and/or pastoralists. They do not follow only one occupation. Reference to Kumhar, Lohar, Sunar, and Chamar is, however, accompanied with connotation of occupation. Hence according to Lohia castes are, in reality, found in the Shudra varna only. With the development of one kind of craft, a group of peoples get associated with it. All the kinds of crafts are collectively put together.

The Jat, Gujar, Ahir are groups, which are treated as jats. We don't come to know about any occupation just by reference to a jati. The trade of milk

is now associated with Ahirs. Traditionally the Ahirs, were not traders of milk. According to Lohia they were a republic society, which settled in India and then merged with the federal system. This merger gave them the identity of a caste. Further, according to him, endogamy is the second characteristic of the caste system. There are number of gotras in a particular caste. Individuals of a given gotra believe that that they have descended from a common ancestor and are of common blood. It is for this reason that people of a gotra do not marry among themselves. They marry outside their gotra but within the caste.

Box 7.1: Caste Restricts Opportunity

"Unlike the Marxist theories which became fashionable in the world in the 50's and 60's, Lohia recognised that caste, more than class, was the huge stumbling block to India's progress. Then as today, caste was politically incorrect to mention in public, but most people practiced it in all aspects of life - birth marriage, association and death. It was Lohia's thesis that India had suffered reverses throughout her history because people viewed themselves as members of a caste rather than citizens of a country. Caste, as Lohia put it, was congealed class. Class was mobile caste. As such, the country was deprived of fresh ideas because of the narrowness and stultification of thought at the top, which was comprised mainly of the upper castes, Brahmin and Baniyas, and tight compartmentalisation even there, the former dominant in the intellectual arena and the latter in the business. A proponent of affirmative action, he compared it to turning the earth to foster a better crop, urging the upper caste as he put it, "to voluntarily serve as the soil for lower castes to flourish and grow", so that the country would profit from a broader spectrum of talent and ideas.In Lohia's words, "Caste restricts opportunity. Restricted opportunity constricts ability. Constricted ability further restricts opportunity. Where caste prevails, opportunity and ability are restricted to ever-narrowing circles of the people". [2] In this own party, the Samyukta (united) Socialist Party, Lohia promoted lower caste candidates both by giving electoral tickets and high party positions. Though he talked about caste incessantly, he was not a casteist — his aim was to make sure people voted for the Socialist party candidate, no matter what his or her caste. His point was that in order to make the country strong, everyone needed to have a stake in it. To eliminate caste, his aphoristic prescription was, "Roti and Beti", that is, people would have to break caste barriers to eat together (Roti) and be willing to give their girls in marriage to boys from other castes (Beti)," (cited from Ramakrishnan, 2005: 2-3).

Quoting Marx, Lohia writes that there is division of labour in the society and people get associated with an occupation. Division of labour leads to specialisation in labour. Large number of branches of production also emerges. People, therefore enter in exchange relationship with other societies (Marx, 1867: 353). According to Lohia the important aspect in Marx's writing is that the exchange takes place not only at individual level, but also at the level of family and tribe. Production takes place at the family level too. Marx believed that the exchange does not take place at individual level. From this we should understand that one or two people do not participate in production, trade and exchange. The whole family takes part in these processes.

Lohia believes that the caste system is restricted to the Shudra varna. He said that the leaders of the society always want to preserve the varna system (Sharma, 2000). He argues that the custodians of society are not bothered if the individuals from the lower varna change their occupation and status but if they try to take up the occupation of the higher varna people and aspire to acquire their status then it is dysfunctional for the society and is strongly resisted by the elite groups (Plato quoted in Sharma, 2000).

a) Dysfunction and Annihilation of Caste

Lohia was of the opinion that caste system in India is the largest single cause of the present material and spiritual degeneration of the country. People often equally the prosperity of their own caste with the country's progress. This is detrimental to the nation's progress. Several political parties talk about abolition of the caste system. Lohia pointed out that while women, harijans, shudras, depressed Muslims and Christians, and Adivasis constitute more than 85 per cent of the total population, their representation in the domains of politics, army, trade, and highly paid government jobs is dismal. Caste system can be abolished only when this imbalance is corrected. He strongly felt that the backward castes should get the opportunity to lead. They should get at least 60 per cent of the key posts in public life. This change should be effected through legal protection. Lohia was optimistic about the preferential opportunity extended to the backward classes. He thought this way India would emerge as a powerful nation.

Box 7.2: Preferential Opportunities

"Lohia identified the prevalent caste system to be the main cause of India's degeneration in all respects including economic and spiritual. According to him, the caste system crushes the human spirit and individual freedom of low castes. For this reason, he suggested special opportunity to be provided to the backward classes. He argued that preferential opportunities should be provided to scheduled caste and other backward sections of the society. Lohia pointed out that backward class consists of women, Harijans, Shudras, Adivasis, depressed Muslims,…… High caste, English education and wealth are the main criteria of India's ruling class therefore, Lohia suggested that preference should be given to these backward classes in the matters of land distribution, employment, and educational opportunities" (Nath, 2002: 216).

Lohia also wanted that the backward castes should understand their own shortcomings. He opined that a lower stratum of society instinctively imitates the elite groups. The backward castes should refrain from imitating the vices of the twice-born castes. Those of the low-caste who hold the positions of leadership must get rid of jealousy and should endeavor to acquire a strong character, because jealousy would throw leadership into the hands of people with evil intentions. Another obstacle in the way of progress of the backward castes is the consolidation of power in the hands of few. Hundreds of 'backward castes' that constitute two-thirds of India's population continue to aspire for access to resources. For parliamentary elections, such backward castes should get our attention. Leaders should be created from their ranks, so that their voices and actions may infuse and inspire satisfaction, self-respect and fearlessness among them.

To make a backward caste prosperous in its collectivity, self-respect and fearlessness are important. A political programme to attack the caste system

must be coupled with social activities such as collective feasting. Lohia was convinced that literature, participation dramas, fairs, and games might serve, as media of cultural interaction, exchange, and diffusion. Arguing against the case that by the destruction of capitalist system through class struggle caste will automatically wither away, Lohia, said, "In the first place, in a country cursed with the caste system, it is not possible to end the feudal and capitalist inequalities through class struggle alone. Moreover, why are those, who view class struggle as inevitable for the establishment of a classless society, so much averse towards caste struggle for creation of a casteless society?" One must strive for destroying class and caste through non-violent and peaceful means of propaganda, organisation and struggle.

b) Lohia's End Caste Conference

Lohia organised a conference "End Caste Conference" in Patna, on March 31- April 2, 1961 and passed the following resolution for the annihilation of caste in India:

1) Mixed Dinner: The Conference appealed to the people of India and its units to organise mixed dinner parties everywhere in the country especially in the village.

2) Marriage: The Conference was of the opinion that the caste system can be destroyed only when inter-caste marriages became common. To propagate these ideas discussions, plays and fairs should be organised. The enforcement of inter-caste marriages by government would not suffice. The Conference was clear that here inter-caste marriage would mean the marriage between Dvija and Shudras or Syeds and Julahas, and not between different sub-castes among high-castes.

3) The Conference suggested opined that titles affixed to names should be evolved in such a way that it does not indicate the caste of a person.

4) The Conference also passed a resolution for granting special opportunities to those who have been oppressed for thousands of years so as to bring about a positive change, in the traditional set up in society because the caste system results in erosion of strength and ability of these. Keeping in mind the question of merit the Conference resolved, "Whether able or not, Women, Shudras, Harijans, Backward Castes, Adivasis, and Muslims like weavers will have to be given 60 per cent reservation "(Lohia, 1964: 141).

The Conference agreed that religious, social, and economic programs would have to be carried out along with a political program to eradicate the caste system. Landless lower castes will have to be provided of land for cultivation and housing by way of re-division of land or through land army. Further, "Religion will also have to be cleared of its rubbish about castes" (Lohia, 1964: 141).

Reflection and Action 7.2

Compare Ambedkar's and Lohia's ideas about annihilation of caste.

7.4 Conclusion

As you would have realised, the ideas of Ambedkar and Lohia converge on many counts. Both of them regarded caste as an oppressive, exploitative system which restricts opportunities and create imbalances and inequalities Both of them agreed that caste should be annihilated through they differed

in the basic approach and the means to annihilate it. While Ambedkar talked about one, common book of Hindu religion and abolition of the institution of traditional priesthood, Lohia focused attention on creating situations of common feasting cultural interactions and cultural exchange. It also favoured implementation of preferential polities for the weak and the downtrodden.

7.5 Further Reading

Ambedkar B. R., 1978, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambdekar's Writings and Speeches*, vol 1, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay

Lohia, Rammanohar, 1964, *The Caste System*, Rammanohar Lohia Samta Vidyalaya Nyas Nyas, Hyderabad

Nath, J.P., 2002, *Socialist Leadership in India*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi