

Book Launching Function:

Gandhi And Ambedkar
Understanding Their Relations
By Raghu Thakur

A meeting of Launching the Book "*Gandhi And Ambedkar Understanding Their Relations*" By Raghu Thakur was held on 6th April 2022 at the Anti-Liquor Campaign Hall, Guntur. The meeting was organized jointly by Jana Chaitanya Vedika, A.P. and Amaravathi Institute of Social Sciences, Guntur.

Prof. A. Subrahmanyam, Retired Professor of Law, Acharya Nagarjuna University presided over the function. Other Hon'ble Guests who spoke on the occasion were: Sri. Dokka Manikya Varaprasad, M.L.C., and Former Minister, Sri. K.S. Lakshmana Rao, M.L.C., Sri. Jupudi Prabhakara Rao, Advisor, Social Justice, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Sri. Modugula Papi Reddy, Member of Official Language Committee, Sri. Vallam Reddy Lakshmana Reddy, State President, Jana Chaitanya Vedika, Sri. Korivi Vinaya Kumar, Dalit Bahujan Front.

Prof. A. Subrahmanyam explained about the context of the book and briefly introduced the contents of the book for the benefit of everyone who could not read the book. He said that Ms. Arundhati Roy, in her book "The Doctor and The Saint", published in 2019 attacked Gandhian thought and penned a distorted version of their relations with prejudice and malice against Gandhi. Her objective appears to be demolition of Gandhi and his core philosophy of non-violence. To achieve this objective she quoted Gandhi out of context by randomly picking up quotations from his writings here and there. The present book by Sri. Raghu Thakur is a fitting reply to Ms. Arundhati Roy in which, Sri. Thakur summarised the essence of Gandhian Thought on important issues like caste, religious scriptures etc. and the relations between Gandhi and Ambedkar in context.

Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi wrote a foreword to the book in which he appreciated the author for clarifying the position of Gandhi vis-à-vis Ambedkar. He pointed out that the conclusions of Ms. Arundhati Roy by quoting here and there without a full understanding of Gandhi on various social and political issues. Further, it is necessary to keep in mind the needs/limitations of leading the freedom movement by rallying all caste Hindus and muslims. One should remember that the benefits of Poona Pact are continuing in the Constitution to this day due to the long term vision of Gandhi. He

appreciated Sri. Raghu Thakur for his comprehensive understanding of Gandhi and his philosophy.

Prof. K.L. Sharma, JNU also wrote another foreword in which he wondered why Ms. Arundhati Roy created a rift between Gandhi and Ambedkar when there is none as a matter of fact. He highlighted that on all occasions, Ambedkar appreciated Gandhi.

Sri. Raghu Thakur gave an outline of the events that prompted him to take up this task of writing a rejoinder to Ms. Arundhati Roy. He shared his deep felt hurt and agony at the incident of removal of the statue of Bapu from the premises of University of Ghana due to the spread of all sorts of canards and misinformation against Gandhi depicting him as anti-black and racist. All this misinformation and false propaganda was at the instance of the book by Ms. Arundhati Roy. Further, he was pained at the apathy of Gandhians, lack of initiative from the Central Government and the then President of India, Sri. Pranab Mukherjee, in correcting the mischievous propaganda and re-installing the statue. This context of apathy and neglect prompted him to bring out this book to make things clear to all right thinking people.

The book is about 180 pages in all with 8 chapters, appendixes with questions/answers and an afterword by Sri. Ram Bahadur Rai.

A brief outline of the book may be presented as follows:

Instead of quoting Ms. Arundhati Roy and enlarging the size of the book, her allegations are presented succinctly and they are clarified sharply.

The accusations against Gandhi are:

- Gandhi accepts *varna dharma* and caste, as such he is anti-dalit.
- He opposed Ambedkar in Round Table Conference and special electorates for dalits, as such he is anti-dalit.
- Gandhi believes in Hindu scriptures which are the foundation for caste system and untouchability, hence he is anti-dalit.

Having formulated the essential points of Arundhati Roy's book, Raghu Thakur clarified how each one of her conclusions was wrong.

Gandhi who adored nature and a self-sustained village without outside interference felt *varna* system would serve the needs of such self-sustained village structure. But he very clearly insisted that *varna* is to be decided by merit and not by birth. He condemned all practices of untouchability as inhuman and as a sin. For Gandhi, a *bhangi* deserves equal respect with a Brahmin. In fact, Gandhi did the work of manual

scavenging work himself and forced Kasturba to do the same. Gandhi said, he would like to be born as a *bhangi* in his next life. Ambedkar also only pointed out the incorrect understanding of Gandhi but never doubted his intentions. Ambedkar observed:

"The real causes of Mahatma's fallacy are two resources from which these can be ascertained. The first is the nature of the Mahatma. For everything he has a child like simplicity and childlike self-deceiving nature too. Like a child he believes in anything he wants. It seems like we should wait for him to leave believing in varna the same way he left believing in caste."

Baba Saheb's prediction proved correct and Gandhi left his ideas on varna also. In 1925 at the meeting of the out caste people when no one was coming forward, Ambedkar hailed the support of Mahatma and in 1927 at the Satyagraha council, Mahatma's portrait was put up at the initiative of Ambedkar. Gandhi continually changed his ideas and in course of time he condemned both varna and caste. He sat on 21 day fast against untouchability and demanded strongest penal legislation to punish practice of untouchability. By 1940s Gandhi blessed only inter-caste marriages. He called upon the girls to marry only harijans. There were dalits in his ashram along with others and when Kasturba was a bit hesitant to have untouchables in the ashram, Gandhi bluntly told her that she may leave the ashram if she feels uncomfortable, but not the untouchable girl. Later Gandhi got married that girl with his near relative. When Ambedkar launched mass conversions and the upper castes were grudging, Gandhi said that it is all due to the inhuman treatment of them and they should atone their sins. It was Gandhi who vetoed all dissenting voices and paved the way for Ambedkar to become Chairman of Drafting Committee.

When the book '*Annihilation of Caste*' by Ambedkar was released, Gandhi appreciated the views expressed in that book so much that he suggested the book to be priced at 2 Annas instead of 12 Annas which was its price.

On the question of separate electorates also Gandhi's opposition was due to the fear of continuous violence in the villages that will ensue if separate electorates are given for the scheduled castes. Unlike Sikhs and Muslims, the untouchable castes are not organized. As on that day they are less articulate and are divided among themselves. Separate electorates would only lead to clashes among themselves and between them and upper castes. The idea of separate electorates is the idea of British raj to divide the

society on caste lines as they did so on religious lines. Poona Pact provided a stable and better alternative to separate electorates. Ambedkar expressed satisfaction at the Poona Pact in 1932. At the Hindu Conference held in Bombay on September 25, 1932, Ambedkar said:

I believe that if I say that it is not superfluous that over the last few days the way I am enmeshed in the religious dilemma, no other person would have been in a similar situation ----I had to choose one of two things. On one side there was a problem of saving the life of India's greatest man. On the other end there was this question of protecting the interests and welfare of the class according to my meagre capacity which I have been trying, since the days of the Round Table Conference. I am pleased to say that with everyone's cooperation such a solution has been found that Mahatma Gandhi's life was saved and the future interests and welfare of the 'Dalit-class' were also protected. I understand that in all this case much of the credit for the solution goes to Mahatma Gandhi himself. I must admit that I, to my surprise, when I met him I found that we both had so many things in common as beliefs.

I am grateful to Mahatma Gandhi for extricating me from a very delicate situation. I only regret---'why didn't Mahatmaji take the same stand during the Round Table Conference?' Had he treated my point of view with such magnanimity at that time, he would not have gone through this crisis. Whatever it is, all these things are of the past. I am glad that I am present today to support this motion'

Poona Pact thus paved way for representation of dalits in the system, Gandhi also was appreciative of Ambedkar and commented on the views of Ambedkar:

Ambedkar could have stuck to his point of view to punish Hindus for their sins over the centuries. Had he done this, I would not have complained to him and my death would have been a small price against the atrocities committed by Hindus on countless generation of Dalits. But he adopted an attitude of generosity and followed forgiveness, the provision of which exists in all religions. I hope that all the upper caste Hindus will prove themselves worthy of this pardon and compromise, will follow the pact verbatim and in a spirit with their implied interests"

On the question of Gandhi's belief in religion and religious scriptures also, Arundati Roy's observations were prejudiced and not based on serious study of Gandhi and his practice. Gandhi was never a Hindu fanatic. He only approved religion to the extent it is useful, particularly in the interests of freedom movement. Gandhi had the larger goal of

rallying Hindus of all castes, bring about Hindu-Muslim unity in the fight for freedom struggle. Amedkar's goal and his mission was different, namely, eradicating the oppression on the dalits. Ambedkar's ideas and practice on religion were aimed at achieving his purpose, while the goal of Gandhi was larger and it was not necessary for him to isolate Hindus. Lohia was a bridge. Lohia commented that it was unnecessary to condemn any religion in totality or identify with it in totality. He prayed, o lord give me the broad outlook of Shiva, liberal attitude of Krishna and the commitment of Rama. Gandhi studied Islam and had teachers also to enlighten him on Khuran. He belonged to Kabir panth and Vaishnava Cult of Kabir. Vishnavism according to Gandhi is to understand the suffering of others and striving to remove that suffering. The famous prayer, '*vaishnava janato*' was Gandhi's religion in belief and practice. It should be noted Gandhi never prayed a statue or image of god nor did he visit any temple for a prayer. When others asked him to visit a temple, he used to question if dalits are allowed into that temple and he would visit that temple along with dalits only. He insisted this when he was in Andhra Pradesh and visited a temple along with dalits. It should be remembered that Gandhi lived in a traditional society and was performing the feat of rallying all of them towards freedom struggle. To criticise him without context and without comprehensive study is only to malign him. Likewise, Arundhati Roy's comments on Gandhi with regard to racism, etc are prejudiced and distorted. She even appreciated Godse in her antipathy toward Gandhi.