

## VIEWS OF Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR ON SOCIO-POLITICAL UPLIFTMENT OF DOWNTRODDEN

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Indian society is an old and extremely complex society. The caste system and Indian society are inseparable. The caste system with all its peculiarities is a unique characteristic of Indian society. For centuries together the lowest stratum of Hindu Society was constituted by the untouchables. Untouchability was a practice which imposes social disabilities on persons by reasons of their birth in certain castes. As a result, the untouchables had to face various forms of exclusion and exploitation such as denying access to state services or remunerative occupations, or forcing Dalits to perform demeaning tasks. Untouchability was the system in which physical contact with the persons and things was avoided because of certain blind beliefs relating to ritual purity and pollution. It is important to note that the three main manifestations of untouchability were — exclusion, humiliation- subordination, and exploitation. The people of other low castes also suffered from exploitation to some extent but the sufferings from exclusion reserved for the untouchables were extreme.

To the Caste Hindus, the touch or shadow or even voice of an untouchable was considered as polluting. They were deprived of many opportunities that were enjoyed by the upper caste people. They were deprived of the right of using wells and their children were forbidden from taking their admission in the schools, attended by caste Hindu children. They were prevented from taking part in the Public services including police and military services. Hereditary occupations and trades were followed by them. “The social segregation kept them untouchable throughout their life. They remained socially degenerated, economically impoverished, politically servants of the upper classes and were permanently excluded from educational and cultural opportunities. (Kuber.; W. N, 1973)

According to Dhananjay Keer, “Before the Indian Constitution abolishing untouchability was adopted in 1950, untouchable classes were divided into three categories – untouchables, unapproachables, and unseeables. They numbered about sixty million out of three hundred million Hindus. That is to say, very nearly twenty percent of Hindustan was untouchables.” ( Dhananjay Keer, 1971 ). Untouchability is thus a social institution in India which legitimizes and enforces the practice of discrimination against people born in particular castes. Besides, it also legitimizes certain practices which are humiliating, exclusionary, and exploitative. Untouchability is also unique because its parent institution—the caste system— can be seen only in the Indian subcontinent.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was placed in the lower strata of such a social order by virtue of his birth. So, obviously, he was an untouchable. Being an untouchable by birth, he had to face social ostracism and isolation. He felt that a large number of his countrymen were deprived from enjoying their legitimate rights. He believed that a democratic society in India would be established, when the untouchables and all other weaker sections of people would be able to enjoy their basic human rights. In his Writings, Ambedkar tried hard to show the mechanisms of the caste system and clarified the origin of the untouchability in order to support his fight for equality. According to him, the lower castes were not in a position to overthrow their oppressors for two reasons: they had partially internalized hierarchy; and because of the very characteristics of the caste –based inequality.

According to Ambedkar, this ‘graded inequality’, was inherent in the caste system of Hindu society. Ambedkar’s main sociological findings were this ‘graded inequality’. He believed that the key element of the caste system was ‘graded inequality’. The untouchables were, in his opinion ‘a disunited body infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as does the high caste Hindu. This caste system among the untouchables has given rise to mutual rivalry and to jealousy and it has made common action impossible’. (Lokhande; G.S.; 1977). According to him , it was very difficult to get rid of such graded inequalities, as the Shudras and Dalits also divided themselves into many jatis. Ambedkar desires first to unite the untouchables and then to endow them with a separate identity.

Ambedkar thought that in the early Indo-Aryan society there was no separate Varna as Shudra. Shudras were at that time in the same rank with the Kshatriyas. But as the Brahmins

refused to perform the Upanayana of the Shudras, they were socially degraded, and fell below the rank of the Vaishyas and thus the fourth Varna was created. The concept of caste had religious sanction behind it through 'Shastras'. It was believed that man originated from the different parts of the divinity. This doctrine 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" (Ambedkar; 1987).

The economic spheres of the society are also overshadowed by this principle of grade inequality. It did not "recognize equal need, equal work, or equal ability as the basis of reward for labour. Its motto is that in regard to the distribution of good things of life those who are reckoned as the highest must get the most and the best and those who are classed as the lowest must accept the least and the worst" (Ambedkar; 1987). This system made difference not only in labour but also in labourers. Labourers are placed one above the other. So, a general movement against the system was impossible.

But the ideal society dreamt by Ambedkar should be based on the principle of liberty, equality and fraternity. This society should be varied, mobile and full of channels for conveying a change taking place from one part to other parts. There should be many interests consciously communicated and shared by the members of this ideal society. According to Ambedkar, all of these qualities could be available in democracy. Democracy is not only a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (Ambedkar; 1987). Ambedkar struggled for the intellectual and social emancipation of the Dalits and stressed the need for removing economic inequalities of the society. He believed that otherwise the sufferers could blow up the democratic structure of our 148 political system.

Ambedkar, the great humanist, believed in cooperation, tolerance, fellowship, peace, and progress in social and political life. He tried his utmost to remove the shackles of caste and untouchability which imprisoned the mind of Indian society. He believed in the freedom of individual to take decisions independently using his intellect. He opined: "Be a light unto yourself. And you can be a light unto yourself; when you go beyond the body, the mind, the heart. Find the centre of your being and suddenly there is light. It is already there, it is already burning bright. It is your very being; you just have to discover it" (Chitkara M.G.; 2002)

Ambedkar tried to ignite in the depressed classes a sense of human dignity, a feeling of self respect and encourage them to struggle for human rights. He believed that the democratic society would be possible in India, only when the untouchables would enjoy basic human rights. He claimed that the depressed classes should be treated as a separate community. They should have reserved seats accompanied by adult suffrage; they should have separate electorate in the absence of such an arrangement. According to Ambedkar: “There can be no doubt that in view of the circumstances, the uplift of the depressed classes will remain a pious hope unless the task is placed in the forefront of all governmental activities and unless equalization of opportunities is realized in practice by a definite policy and determined efforts on the part of government” (Ambedkar, B.R., 1930).

He suggested to entrust the state with the responsibility to develop the policies and programmes for educational and economic development of the scheduled castes. His suggestion was also to maintain a separate administrative division to deal with the problems and to protect the interests of the depressed classes for their wellbeing. According to him the representation of the untouchables in the process of decision – making at all levels of the government was very much essential. Ambedkar observed : “Just as it is necessary that the Depressed Classes should have the power to influence governmental action by seats in the Legislature , so also it is desirable that the Depressed Classes should have the opportunity to frame the general policy of the government. This they can do only if they can find a seat in the cabinet” ( Ambedkar, B.R. and Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan, 1930).

Ambedkar wanted to bring revolutionary changes through the Constitutional means so that the downtrodden people would be able to enjoy Fundamental Human Rights. He had demonstrated his determination to reform Indian society by recommending the adoption of a Western-inspired Civil Code and opposing delegates who wished to maintain personal laws, especially Muslims representatives, during the debates of the Constituent Assembly. He opined, “I personally do not understand why religion should be given this vast, expansive jurisdiction, so as to cover the whole of life and to prevent the legislature from encroaching upon the field. After all, what are we having this liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which is so full of inequities, discriminations and other things, which conflict with our Fundamental Rights.” (CAD; Vol.7; 1948).

In his grand scheme of social reconstruction in India, Dr. Ambedkar fought for rights of representation as democratic rights. He advocated for representation of all sections of society including women in the spheres of education, employment, agriculture, industry, bureaucracy, and governance of this country on the basis of proportional rate. His memoranda, submitted to the Southborough Committee, Montague-Chemsfeld Committee, Muddiman Committee and his arguments in Round Table Conferences are based on the rights of representation as democratic rights. Dr. Ambedkar desired social reforms instead of sectional reforms. The Charter of Rights and Demands which Ambedkar presented before the Simon Commission had a great constitutional significance for equal citizenship. He was the only person who raised voice in the Round Table Conferences for Civic equality, Adult Franchise and Citizenship for all Indians.

The introduction of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India promulgated in 1950, were virtually the result of the various memoranda submitted by Ambedkar to various committees on different occasions. In the memorandum which he submitted to the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference in 1930, there were conditions on which the oppressed minority would accept a majority rule in independent India. The memorandum stated inter alia: "All subjects of the state in India are equal before the law and possess equal civic rights. Any existing enactment, regulation, order, customs or interpretation of law by which any penalty, disadvantage, disability, is imposed upon or any discrimination is made against any subject of the state on account of untouchability shall, as from the day on which this Constitution comes into operation, cease to have any effect in India." (Ambedkar; B.R.; 1945).

As a member of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights on Minorities, Ambedkar was able to provide reservation of seats for the backward communities not only in Central Legislature but also in State Legislatures. His active efforts provided reservation in the services for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Special provision of grants for educational advancement was also included. Art. 335 gives a general direction to the Union and State governments to special considerations to the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the services. Since the early 1950s, the spread of education among the SCs and STs has been a major part of the government programmes. These programmes includes mainly financial support in the forms of scholarship stipends at the school and college levels , construction of hostels for

students of these communities. There are reserved seats in engineering and medical colleges for SC and ST students. The policies of government helps the depressed classes to take access to the educational services. Thus 155 policies and programmes of government have helped, to a large extent, the weaker sections in getting access to different jobs in governments departments, public sector undertakings, political arena and educational institutions. The reservation of jobs has led to a increase in their earnings. It also helps them to increase their security and prestige.

The need for the development of the weaker sections both socially and economically has fully recognized by the Indian Constitution. In accordance with Art. 17 of the Indian Constitution ‘untouchability’ is a punishable offence. So, as per this article, we have legally abolished untouchability and there is no room for it in India. Art. 15 granted right to profess any religion to every citizen of India. Again according to Art. 15 of the Indian Constitution in the chapter of Fundamental Rights no citizen will be discriminated on the basis of religion, race, caste, or sex. Our Constitution also provides reservation of seats for the backward sections in the Lok Sabha and in the Bidhan Sabhas. (Art.330 and 334 accordingly). The seventy third Amendment Act 1992 of the Constitution provides reservation of seats for the weaker sections in the panchayats (from the village ti the zilla parishad level). Besides these safeguards for weaker sections, some other protective and anti-exploitative measures have also been provided.

The movement launched by Ambedkar inspired the depressed classes to fight for establishing their rights and successfully brought about improvements in their economic and social condition, political representation, and educational and cultural achievements. Ambedkar viewed that, “Unless the Indian people secure political power and this political power concentrates in the hands of the socially suppressed section of the Indian society, it is not possible to completely wipe out all social, legal, and cultural disabilities, from which this section suffers.” (Lokhande; G.S.; 1977).

According to Ambedkar, the real cleavage among Hindus was not between Brahmins and non-Brahmins but between ‘touchables’ and Untouchables. Ambedkar denied an electoral system based on territorial constituencies. Because, he believed that in that case , the untouchables would find themselves in a minority and would have been denied from representation. Dr. Ambedkar suggested to the down-trodden people to be united to uplift their socio-economic position. According to him, political power is the master key through which



each and every lock can be opened. And by this weapon, the depressed class should try to work for social transformation. Thus Ambedkar wanted to awake Indian society to put an end for ever to the poverty, misery, and inhuman conditions from which the untouchables has been suffering for centuries.

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