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DR. B.R.AMBEDKAR: THE MESSIAH OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played a vital role in shaping the modern Indian society. He strongly denounced the outrageous attitude of the Brahmanical Hinduism towards the untouchables and worked for the liberation of the untouchables from the oppression of High Caste Hindus. He tried to remove untouchability in order to establish a new social order based on the principle of equality. His entire life has been a saga of relentless crusade for social justice. Ambedkar fought a different war of freedom for most oppressed sections of society in India. His freedom struggle was based on the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; these were first announced during French revolution and subsequently affected the societies and groups of people across the countries in the whole world.

In his endeavour to liberate the suppressed and oppressed masses Dr. Ambedkar made consistent efforts and resorted to all ways and means at his disposal. In order to ensure the unfiltered enjoyment of Fundamental Human Rights by the downtrodden segment of Indian Society, Ambedkar sought to introduce radical and revolutionary changes through constitutional means. The work for the upliftment of untouchables done by Dr. Ambedkar is important because it was done by an untouchable for the untouchables. Really, Dr. Ambedkar was a great leader of all the downtrodden, exploited and sufferers of the Society.

Key words: Untouchability, Downtrodden, Oppressed Masses, Social Justice, Human Rights.

Introduction

Dr. Ambedkar is renowned as a political leader, as a great jurist and as one of the

framers of the Indian Constitution. But above all he is remembered for his unrelenting fight to abolish untouchability.

He was the social prophet of the Untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar hailed from a poor family belonging to an untouchable community called Mahar according to Hindu religion. He was born on 14th April 1891 at Mhow (now in Madhya Pradesh) where his father was in military service. His early life was full of sorrows and calamities. When he was only six years old, his pious mother Smt. Bhima Bai left for heavenly abode.³ Born as an untouchable, Dr. Ambedkar had to face social ostracism and isolation and early in life he realized that large section of his countrymen was denied their legitimate rights by the oppressive social customs. A pragmatist to the core, Ambedkar believed that the establishment of a democratic society in India would be possible only when the untouchables and other sections of the society could be given the opportunity to enjoy basic human rights. He gives a graphic picture of the plight of the untouchables in the following words.

“The Hindu society insists on segregation of the quarters of the untouchables. The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the untouchables and will not allow the untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters. This is a fundamental feature of untouchables as it is practiced by the

Hindus. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindu live in the village and the untouchables in the ghetto. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar came to the conclusion that nowhere except in India there existed permanent segregation camps and there had never been a case of a people treating a section of their own people as permanent and hereditary slaves. Unsociability was a unique phenomenon unknown to humanity except the Hindus. Although the untouchables constituted a substantial part of Hindu society, they were denied the social and civic rights as they were not considered citizens.

For centuries, the untouchables of India had been subjected to inhuman treatment by the Hindus in the name of religion. They were not only at the lowest rank of the social order but were also denied all avenues of progress and self elevation. They were not only damned as belonging to a lower class, but as conveying by their very presence an actual pollution which required purificatory religious ceremonies. How the monster of untouchability followed the untouchable at every step is very well illustrated by the life story of Dr. Ambedkar himself.

1. At School at Satara, he was made to sit outside the class room on a piece

of gunny mat, which he had to carry to the school. Many a time he had to go without water, not because there was no water but because he being an untouchable, had no right to drink from the common source.

2. At Satara again, some of the teachers would not touch his note books for fear of being polluted.
3. Outside school, the treatment meted to him was even worse. "Touch me not" was the rule for him everywhere.
4. As a man of learning and high official in the Baroda State in 1917 he was subjected to inhuman treatment, drinking water was not available to him in office, his subordinates kept distance from him; even the peons, fearful of pollution, threw files and papers on to his desk from a distance.
5. At Baroda again, he could not get accommodation and was thrown out even from Parsi Dharmasala. Hence he had to resign in disgust and return to Bombay.
6. As Professor in Bombay in 1918 –

20, he was treated as a Paraiyah by the Hindu Professors and was not allowed to drink water from the pot kept in the professors Common room; and

7. When in 1923, he started his practice as barrister in the High Court at Bombay, "The solicitors would not condescend to have any business with him on the ground of untouchability. Even the humble canteen boy would not serve him tea.

This being the case of Dr. Ambedkar who was a highly educated person and living in a metropolitan city like Bombay it is not difficult to imagine the plight of the poor and helpless untouchables living in the smaller towns and villages. To begin with, Dr. Ambedkar surveyed the situation and reflected on the causes and came to the conclusion that the untouchables had no voice and no resistance power. As a first step, therefore he found in Jan 1920 a Maratha Fortnightly paper and named it Mook Nayak (Leader of the Dumb). In the first issue itself Ambedkar laid emphasis on the necessity of awakening the down – trodden from their age – old lethargy and in – action. He asserted that in order to save the depressed classes from perceptual slavery,

Development of Thought:

He, belonging to the Mahar caste- an untouchable Maharashtrian community- Ambedkar had experienced at first hand the agonies, anguishes, frustration and humiliation of this degrading Hindu Brahminical social structure. Nobody can be opposed to his view that for the untouchable, the liberation from the degrading humiliations imposed by Hinduism was a matter of more urgent necessity than even the political liberation from the alien British rule. It did not make him any less a patriot or a nationalist.

His conversion to Buddhism shows that he contemplated a future for the untouchables somewhat in separation from the broad stream of the Hindu society. Gandhi did not want to disrupt the organic structure of the Hindu society. But Ambedkar wanted the separation of the Untouchables from the Hindu society and hence demanded a separate electorate. A brilliant and highly educated, he was one of the chief framers of the Constitution of free India which granted equal rights to all citizens and abolished the inhuman practice of untouchability.

Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha

In his endeavour to liberate the suppressed and oppressed masses Dr. Ambedkar made consistent efforts and resorted to all ways and means at his disposal. On 20th July 1924, he founded a society known as Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha, the aims and objective of which were “to protect the spread of education and culture among the depressed classes; and to advance and improve their economic conditions”. Founding the society he began organizing his people in a systematic manner. First he made these unfortunate classes, conscious of their miserable condition and how to elevate them. This task he accomplished through his effective inspiring and purposeful speeches and writings. Self – help and unity were the key note of his advice to his people. He often told them “you must abolish your slavery by yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon God or Superman. Your salvation lies in political powers and not in making pilgrimage and observance of fasts. Devotion to scriptures would not free you from your bondage, want and poverty.”

Dr. Ambedkar established in Bombay an “Antyaja Sangh” and its main aim was to serve the down-trodden in every aspect. Dr. Ambedkar thus established Dalit Sati

Siksham Samiti and he himself was the General Secretary of the Samiti. In Bombay he started a SamataSamajSangh” and its main work was to safeguard the civil rights of the untouchable.

Satyagraha Movements

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Temple. In the end the down-trodden got the facility of entering the temple since October 1935, on account of the continuous struggle and successful leadership of Dr. Ambdkar.

Dr. Ambedkar was a revolutionary. He inspired the untouchables self-help, self-upliftment and self-respect. He had a great love and affection for the untouchables and as a leader he talked very sympathetically with untouchables poor, paupers and the down-trodden. The lectures and meetings of Dr. Ambedkar left an everlasting effect on the depressed classes and they got ready to rise against their slavery and were moved a lot.

The Untouchables under the British

The condition of the untouchables during the British rule presented a dismal picture of decay, degradation and demoralization. Even the social reform movements like the Brahmo Samj, had no effective influence in the upliftment of the untouchables. According to Dr. Ambedkar it was a class struggle between the touchable majority and untouchable minority.

Complete destitution and helplessness made the untouchables the bounden slaves of Hindu Society. They were just hewers of wood and drawers of water. Their condition

was worse than that of the Negroes of America. The Negroes did not have free access to the coaches reserved for the whites in the trains and the buses. This discrimination was based on the principle of “Separate but Equal”, notwithstanding the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the condition of the Negroes was certainly better than the condition of the untouchables. He pointed out the differences between the slavery of the Negroes and untouchability of the downtrodden.

Dr. Ambedkar in the First Round Table Conference

In order to ensure the unfiltered enjoyment of Fundamental Human Rights by the downtrodden segment of Indian Society, Ambedkar sought to introduce radical and revolutionary changes through constitutional means. He laid down the model Articles of Fundamental rights. Various political safeguards were envisaged for the depressed classes by Dr. Ambedkar.

- Equal citizenship and fundamental rights declaring the practice of untouchability” as illegal.
- Free enjoyment of equal rights

protected by adequate constitutional remedies.

- Protection against discrimination.
- Adequate representation to the depressed classes in the legislatures, adult suffrage and separate electorates to the depressed classes for ten years.
- Adequate representations in services.
- Redress against prejudicial action or neglect of interest – facilities for education, etc.
- Special departmental care and special minister

For political emancipation of the untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar wanted reservation in the Legislature, for economic development he desired nationalisation of agriculture and reservation for them till the continuance of untouchability and for special rehabilitation he advocated inter-caste dining and marriage and even change of Hindu religion. He himself started

People’s Education Society in 1946 which established Siddhartha group of Educational Institutions at Bombay and Milind group of Education Institutions at Aurangabad.

Dr. Ambedkar gave a clarion call to Shudras to believe in self-help and organise themselves to achieve their rights. He always advocated establishment of organisations like depressed classes league, Buddhist Society of India, Bharatiya Vahishkrit Samaj Sevak Sangh, Samta Mandal, Mahar Watander Gavakamgar Association and even formed Independent Labour Party and later the Rrepublican Party of India. He gave the slogan: "To live with respect is a birth right of man."

Abolition of Untouchability in the Constitution

Dr. Ambedkar had also the honour of abolishing untouchability legally. Article 17 of the Constitution of India clearly says, "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden." The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable with law.

Conclusion

The work of upliftment of untouchables done by Dr. Ambedkar is important because it was done by an untouchable for the untouchables. Really, Dr. Ambedkar was a great leader of all the downtrodden,

exploited and sufferers of the Society. He sacrificed all his life and his message cannot be separated. The Scheduled Caste people who had no right to pull water from the well, no right to enter the temple, no opportunity to get education and deprived from all socio-political religious rights are not in such condition today. This is only because of the laudable and indomitable endeavour of Dr. Ambedkar. He quenched his thirst from his tears and drizzled smiling dew on others. Dr. Ambedkar was a social prophet of the Untouchables. He denounced the monstrous iniquities and outrageous calumnies which Brahminical Hinduism has heaped upon the untouchables and the bitterness of his fur Hinduism is apparent in his works.

There is no doubt that he was a patriot and would not be opposed to national integration. Nobody can be opposed to his view that for the Untouchables, the liberation from the degrading humiliation imposed by Hinduism was a matter of more urgent necessity than even the political liberation from the alien British rule.

In the history of modern Indian political thought, Ambedkar will have significant place because through his scholarly writings, speeches, leadership constructive work, he highlighted the political, economic and

social problems the vast Untouchable community whose members may be now more than eight crores.

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