

Caste, Representation, and Resistance: B. R. Ambedkar's Politics for the Depressed Classes

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Abstract : *A brilliant personality in the Indian social movement is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. This man of rare talent has fought all his life for the solution of the important problems of contemporary India. Among the problems that particularly stirred this sensitive statesman, the question of the liberation of Dalits and untouchables was the most important. From childhood, he realized that the long-standing caste system was the main cause of social discrimination. Therefore, he considered the need to establish the values of social rights, equality, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc. in the society to be extremely urgent. He not only gave assurances for the exploited, deprived, oppressed Dalits, but also made good arrangements so that they could actually enjoy rights and justice. The research article under preparation contains a small reflection of that.*

Keywords: *Caste, Dalit, Depressed Classes, Exploited, Equality, Freedom, Oppressed etc.*

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Introduction

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in a poor Mahar family in Maharashtra. *Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras* - outside this four-caste society are considered 'A-Varnas'. After all, the 'Mahars' are untouchable caste. At their touch and even at their sight, the upper caste goes. Therefore, their social contact with the established caste Hindu society is very weak - almost non-existent. In 1935, he renounced all ties with Brahmanical Hinduism, calling it "oppressive". But formally accepted Buddhism much later. He converted to Buddhism in Nagpur in October 1956 along with about 100,000 followers.

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From this it can be understood that he did not abandon Hinduism due to the attraction of Buddhism. The casteism and inhumanity of Hinduism made him averse to this religion. However, he did not live long after converting to Buddhism. He died on 6th December of the same year. His long life of 65 years was naturally busy and eventful. A chronological account of his life is not possible within the short scope of our discussion. Rather, let us focus on the way his thoughts revolved around the three-pronged cycle of Indian politics at that time.

B.R. Ambedkar, in his anti-untouchability movement and guiding the emancipation of Dalits and Shudras, developed a novel struggle by combining the three-dimensional ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity, which was rooted in his childhood, education and career as a representative of the Dalit community, facing unwanted and inhumane incidents and a painful experience derived from it.

B.R. Ambedkar's struggle against untouchability began after his return to the country from abroad. From adolescence to adulthood, he was everywhere hated, despised and insulted. Elphinstone College was not left out. He felt the attitude of the so-called upper castes towards the untouchables. In his mind, a comparison naturally arose between the motherland, the cradle of untouchability, and America, the land of higher education. He joined the society there and understood what freedom is, how liberal and progressive the society is free from untouchability. He resolved to free his motherland from the curse of untouchability. His fixed aim was to eradicate untouchability and establish social and political rights of the untouchables. He made efforts to stop oppression of untouchables and establish proper rights of people.

Being born in an untouchable Mahar's family, he had to suffer upper caste prejudice and deprivation from his very childhood. In many educational institutions, he did not get the opportunity to study in the same seat as caste Hindus. It was also unimaginable for him to drink water with his teammates from one place. Despite his desire, he did not get the opportunity to learn Sanskrit due to his lower caste status. Instead, you have to stop learning Persian. In short, Ambedkar can only understand how painful it can be to be born in an untouchable family. This prejudice, discrimination and attachment of caste Hindus towards non-castes have been so unquestioned and uninterrupted for so long that it has acquired a strange normality in Indian society. Brahminical ideology gave such legitimacy to the dominance of the upper castes that no guilt could arise in their minds. The 'Manusmriti' is identified as the classic text of Brahmanical philosophy for a number of reasons. Just one example from this book will suffice to understand the issue of validation. Manu, the author of

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this oldest legal text in India, recommended separate punishment for the same crime by caste. According to this principle, the 'Adi-shudras' outside the caste system should be punished much more severely than the Brahmins for the same offence. On the other hand, the lower class people did not show the urge to oppose this hegemony. It cannot be said that he did not show at all. The first revolt of the lower classes against the dominance of the upper castes echoed through the rise of Buddhism. The great popularity of Buddhism among the lower classes during this period bears witness to it. But on the whole the Brahmanical ideology has taught them to accept all these as the result of previous births ('putnajormo'). If the pain of this life is accepted for the sake of the previous birth, it becomes more bearable and natural. But the moment it breaks through the veil of idealism, it seems inconsolable and unbearable. B.R. Ambedkar understood that the caste system would never capture its naked form in personal experience unless the validity of the Brahmanical ideology at the heart of it was challenged. His political thinking is indicative of this protest mentality.

According to B.R. Ambedkar, untouchability has destroyed the self-confidence of a large section of Hindu society for ages. So one aspect of his struggle was to oppose India's Brahminical Hinduism, its caste system and ultimately the caste system. He believed that occupational social stratification was created on the basis of India's caste system. According to Ambedkar, in order to reform the Hindu society, the first step is to abolish caste system. He questioned the morality of caste in Brahmanical religion. According to him "The influence of caste on Hindu morality is hopelessly deplorable. This caste division has killed manpower. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Caste is the people of Hindus. His responsibility is only to his caste system. His loyalty is limited to that caste. Virtue is caste-dependent and its morality is bounded by caste boundaries. No sympathy for the fit. No respect for talented people. There is no mercy for him who is in need. There is no response to the victim's calls. There is mercy, which begins and ends, in caste. There is sympathy, but not for people of a different class. Will a Hindu accept and follow the leadership of a great and honorable man?"¹

While fighting against untouchability, Ambedkar understood the need for a strong organization and an independent mouthpiece for that organization. At this time, he published a weekly newspaper called 'Muknayak' (Leader of Voiceless) in 1920 with the financial support of the Maharaja of Kolhapur with the aim of awakening the consciousness of the Shudra community against caste discrimination and education of the untouchables.² Through this magazine he heralded the emergence of a new generation. This new generation was

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equipped to destroy the apartheid politics and move forward in a new direction. So far, the upper castes have not been able to show the liberal mindset of listening to the Dalit community. 'Muknayak' magazine presented to the society the anguished song of life composed with the cry of the voiceless nation. In fact, He wanted to convey the sound of the voiceless community in the right sense and in the right way to the arena of the so called 'Shabdmukha' society. He realized that social discrimination, untouchability was widespread in Hindu society. Because it is rooted in centuries-old casteism, which is associated with caste system. He throughout his life struggled for justice, social dignity and freedom for millions of downtrodden people. He realized that without the awareness of the oppressed, deprived or untouchable people who are backward in the society, their social progress are never possible.

B.R. Ambedkar was the voice of the voiceless, the hope of the hopeless and above all the beacon of light in the darkness. His conviction was that the social rights of the untouchables were the first priority. Self-reliance, self-development and self-respect were the mottos of his struggle for the rights of the untouchable 'Shudra' community. He fought vigorously for the establishment of social rights and social freedom of the untouchables. He was responsible for the larger social life. That is why he played a proactive role in protecting the interests of the untouchables and the deprived. In 1923, the Bombay Provincial Legislature passed the 'Bole Resolution'. According to this proposal, common water bodies, hospitals, schools, government offices, courts, hospitals and others have equal rights with untouchables. Motivated by this proposal, the 'Mahar Municipality' declared Chaudapukur free for untouchables in 1924. But the matter remains a settled decision, in practice the upper castes and superhuman beings use water freely, but restrictions remain in force for the untouchables. On 19th and 20th March 1927, he decided to take direct action. He called a conference. Inspired by his fiery speeches, the untouchables vowed to end their thousands of years of humiliation and establish their rights. On the second day of the conference, he along with the delegation proceeded towards Chaudarpukur with a historic procession. He was the first to touch and drink water and break centuries of untouchability. Chaudapukur premises became resounding with the cheers of thousands of people. At this time Ambedkar was honored as 'Babasaheb'. A significant success of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the field of social movement comes in this way.

B.R. Ambedkar attended all three Round Table Conferences held in London in 1930-32. In these conferences, he stressed the separate identity of the 'untouchables' in India and

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demanded separate constituency status for them. On this issue, he clashed with Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference held from September to December 1931. The British government accepted Ambedkar's demand and in 1932 awarded the 'Communal Award', which provided separate constituencies for the oppressed classes. In protest, Gandhi went on a fast unto death. There was immense pressure on Ambedkar to withdraw his demand for separate constituency status for the 'untouchables'.³ Ambedkar was undeterred and said, "The Mahatma is not an immortal person, nor is the Congress."⁴ Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the untouchables remain untouchables." But in the end, he signed the well-known 'Poona Pact' on September 24, 1932, to ensure 'reserved seats' for the 'untouchables'. This pact was later implemented in the Government of India Act, 1935.⁵

On 17 August 1932, British Prime Minister Mac Donald announced a separate electoral roll for the Depressed Classes and granted them the right to vote in general constituencies as an integral part of Hindu society. However, this system of separate electoral rolls was to continue for twenty years if not abolished earlier. On 18 August 1932, Gandhiji warned the British Prime Minister to revise the terms of the award and threatened that if the government did not withdraw separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, he would go on a "go on fast unto death". In reply, the Prime Minister said, "We felt of our duty to safeguard what we believe to be the right of the depressed Classes to a fair proportion of representation in the legislatures, we were equally careful to do nothing that would split off their community from the Hindu world. You yourself stated in your letter of March 11, that you were not against their representation on the Legislatures."⁶ In response to Gandhiji's position, Dr. Ambedkar argued that separate electorates were as harmful to Sikhs and Muslims as they were to the depressed classes.⁷ Gandhiji finally agreed to a revised form of political representation for the depressed classes and said, "My fast is only against separate electorates and not against statutory reservation of seats."⁸

Gandhi did not want to disrupt the Hindu caste system and sought reforms within that framework. Gandhiji believed that the abolition of untouchability required a change of heart among the common castes. He emphasized the penance of the upper castes. But Ambedkar wanted to completely dismantle the Hindu caste system and sought political power as well as legal protection for the untouchables. Ambedkar said that changing the name from untouchable to 'Harijan', as proposed by Gandhiji and the Congress Party, would not improve their lot.⁹

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At least three notable themes of Brahmanical Hindu ideology recur repeatedly in his writings. Again, he considered each of these three issues to be against modernity. First, he believed that individual freedom was undermined by the recognition of group supremacy in the caste system. In his book “Annihilation of the Caste” published in 1935, he first attacked the Hindu caste system from the perspective of individual freedom. Modernity recognizes that the individual has individuality beyond caste. But within the boundaries of caste, individuality can never be manifested in self-glory. The caste system has always sought to erode the individuality of the individual. Being bound by various rules and regulations, customs, order and discipline, the individuality of the individual could never be the goal. A simple example can be given. In the Hindu caste system, self-marriage is customary. According to this custom a Brahmin man can marry only a Brahmin woman.¹⁰ But if two men and women of different castes express their desire to marry, it cannot be consummated according to Brahmanical Hindu ideology. Thus the absolute personal freedom to marry according to their own choice is undermined. Needless to say, Ambedkar while criticizing the Brahmanical Hindu ideology. Ambedkar was inspired by the modern individualist ideology.

Secondly, B.R. Ambedkar's writings also present a different kind of criticism of Brahmanical Hindu ideology. He felt that the permanent untouchability of any group for the sake of ideology was not in line with the ideals of modern social justice. Needless to say, his later writings placed more emphasis on ideals of social justice than individualism. In his book *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, published in 1942, Ambedkar described the Indian caste system as antithetical to ideals of social justice. This same statement can be noted in his famous book “Who were the Shudras?” published in 1946. Whether Ambedkar was against any kind of social injustice or not is difficult to say precisely. He never accepted the division of social classes on the basis of merit as social discrimination if there were equal opportunities. But he used to say that depriving a particular non-color group of social, economic or political opportunities on the basis of birth on the basis of ideology is not in accordance with the ideals of social justice. It must be remembered that social division is not necessarily discriminatory and inconsistent with ideals of social justice. But social division takes an extreme form when it develops under the caste system and discriminates on the basis of birth, depriving the individual of the freedom to develop his talents to the full extent of his own will. In fact, criticism from a social justice perspective is also inextricably linked to the question of individual freedom. One cannot be discussed in isolation from the other.

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Thirdly, Ambedkar also criticized Brahmanical Hindu ideology from the point of view of caste formation. As we have already said, the caste system and the social distance between castes and non-castes never allowed Hindus to be known as a well-rounded nation. This structural hindrance of the Hindu caste system has never allowed the larger nation-building process in India to gain sustenance. It was very important to assert our identity as an integral nation while resisting colonialism. And if we cannot do that, we have already said that the full development of modernity is not possible. Consequently, the development of modernity depended on the success of nation-building in countries like India. If we do not destroy the infrastructure of the caste system, we cannot be counted as a nation. And if it cannot be counted as a nation, the development of modernity is impossible. In this sense, the view of nation building was closely related to the question of India's modernity. There was no doubt in his mind that the formation of an integral Indian nation would accelerate the development of modernity in India.

Two other aspects of Brahmanical Hindu ideology that he severely criticized were blind faith in the inerrancy of the Vedas. Hindus, regardless of caste, believe that the Vedas are infallible because they are 'imperishable'. It is this blind faith that has protected the Vedas (and other Indian scriptures) from all possible criticism. Again, this Veda is the first caste system in India. As a result, Brahmanical Hinduism never faced any harsh criticism. As a result, a rare rigidity has come into it. Besides, the other important thing that Ambedkar criticizes is the predominance of supernatural liberation over divine happiness. Brahmanical Hindu ideology never emphasized divine happiness. As a result, Hindus found it preferable to lead their lives according to the strict precepts of the caste system. While doing this they actually suffered a lot of discrimination and pain, but they never felt tired or depressed. Rather the opposite has happened. Transcendental emancipation is possible only by strictly adhering to the strict precepts of the caste system – this is what the Brahmanical Hindu ideology taught them. People have learned to accept the discrimination and deprivation of this world with a smile, without question, in the hope of supernatural liberation. Just as Ambedkar called for an open mind to judge all Hindu scriptures in the light of reason, why not only the Vedas, he considered the search for supernatural liberation to be 'illusory' and 'miraculous'. Standing on the firm ground of logic and materialism, he severely criticized the Brahmanical Hindu ideology. Needless to say, logic and materialism - both are essential conditions of Western modernity. In this sense, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Ambedkar was a large-scale modern minded man.

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Babasaheb Ambedkar's important step in the struggle against untouchability was the right to access to temples for Dalits. Untouchable peoples had no right to enter Hindu temples. He came forward to protest this inequality and injustice in protest. In 1927, he in a meeting spoke about the right of untouchables to enter all Hindu temples. There was a conflict between untouchable Hindus and Hindus, and a struggle by untouchables in protest against it. He had to lead again and again. He led hundreds of followers to enter temples of untouchables in different parts of India. Because until now, the doors of these temples were closed to the untouchables. By entering the temple with the untouchables in a strong and strong struggle, he explained that the untouchables have the right to get religious and social justice. The main objective of his temple entry struggle for untouchables was to establish the social rights and human dignity of Dalits.

From April 1927, Ambedkar started publishing a magazine called 'Bahishkrito Bharat'. There he highlighted the various demands of the untouchables and also protested the unjust treatment. In other words, 'Bahishkrito Bharat' started appearing as the mouthpiece of the untouchables. In 1924 on behalf of the untouchables, he formed the 'Bahiskrito Hitkarini Sabha' with people from the untouchables. He also formed an association to remove various restrictions on the untouchables. In 1928 he formed the 'Depressed Classes Education Society'.¹¹ The main aim of which was to provide education to the boys and girls of the oppressed class from the hostel. He believed that the emancipation of the untouchables would come only when they received proper education. For that reason, he investigated the social, financial and educational issues of the untouchables and formed societies for their development.

'Manusmriti' is considered to have a special role in strengthening the caste system. Ambedkar strongly condemned the ancient Indian Hindu text 'Manusamhita' in various meetings of the anti-untouchability movement. As a protest, the 'Manusamhita' was burned on December 25, 1927. Because it is said in this scripture that Brahmins are the lords of the world and Shudras are only slaves, it is also a crime to accumulate wealth of 'Shudras'. He felt that this scripture is the book of extreme destruction of the 'Shudra' caste, has taken away all the rights of the untouchables. The untouchable lower castes have been neglected, deprived and neglected in Indian society for ages.

The so-called lower caste people in Hindu society in India had no social and political rights for thousands of years. They lived a kind of social slavery. Ambedkar expressed his

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well-thought-out views on 'Varnasrama', caste system and untouchability in various books.

B.R. Ambedkar in his book 'Annihilation of Caste' said,

"1. Caste system has destroyed Hindus.

2. It is impossible to reform Hindu society on the basis of four castes. Because the caste system is like pouring water into a leaky vessel. It can never protect its own religion, it is bound to transform into a caste system in the end. Because, there is no system of strict punishment against the violators of the caste system.

3. Restructuring Hindu society on the basis of four varnas is harmful. Because the caste system prevented the people from learning weaponry and turned them into uneducated eunuchs.

4. Hindu society has to be restructured in such a way that the principles of equality, friendship and freedom are implemented.

5. To reach this goal religious support behind caste and caste must be stopped.

6. Religious support on the back of caste and caste can be stopped only when the divine doctrine of the scriptures is denied. Babasaheb Ambedkar struggled to free the untouchables from this social shackles.¹² Because he himself has been a victim of social slavery many times in his life. The Shudra community has been crushed and neglected for ages in the caste society structure. Babasaheb Ambedkar's long struggle to establish the status of untouchables as human beings is a landmark event in the social development of India.

The rights of consciousness of the untouchable 'Shudras' stands on a much stronger foundation since Ambedkar began to lead. In 1936, he founded the 'Independence Labor Party', in 1942 he formed the 'All India Scheduled Castes Federation', in 1945 he formed the 'People's Education Society'. Ambedkar realized that establishing the rights of the untouchables required political power, modern education and organization. His rallying cry for the Dalit community was Educate, Agitate and Organize.¹³ Following Ambedkar's life philosophy, it is evident that he dreamed of a non-discrimination society by shaking the foundations of a discriminatory society.

B.R. Ambedkar thought of lifelong struggle for marginalized people of society. He dreamed of equal opportunities and justice for all in social democracy. He thinks the role of morality is essential in achieving freedom and equality. He used to say "Religion is for man and not man for religion"¹⁴. A religion that does not consider human beings as human beings, and ruthlessly takes away even the water of thirst, that religion is no religion at all. According to him, "Religion must be judged by social standards based on social ethics. No other

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standard would have any meaning if religion is held to be a necessary good for that well-being of the people.”¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, Ambedkar's social philosophy is based on three foundations, equality, freedom and fraternity. He said, “It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognizes these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.”¹⁶ If any religion does not recognize these three basic principles of social life then it is bound to go down the path of destruction. It should not be forgotten that Ambedkar's target here is the so-called Hinduism, where these basic ideals of social life have been consciously and subtly hijacked from the larger sections of society. As a result, Ambedkar gave a clear indication of where Hinduism was heading. To him, the so-called Hinduism without the concept of freedom, equality and fraternity became empty. Hence, reformation of this religion is urgently needed. Otherwise the exploitation of the lower caste people by the upper caste Hindus, not even recognizing them as human beings, will one day push the entire society into dire danger. He understood that untouchability cannot be eradicated unless social disparities are removed. The treatment of untouchable Shudras is discriminatory in the true sense and it is anti-humanity. Ambedkar founded He wanted to establish social justice based on the three ideals of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. In his words, “My ideal would be a society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.”¹⁷

Babasaheb Ambedkar emphasized on equality, liberty and fraternity in his philosophy. He said about equality, “If all men are equal, all men are of the same essence and the common essence entitles them to the same fundamental rights and to equal liberty.”¹⁸ For Ambedkar, brotherhood was one of the most sacred things. Another form of humanity and religion is brotherhood. Ambedkar said, “Fraternity is the name for disposition of an individual to treat-men as the object of reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with his fellow beings”.¹⁹ On the other hand, freedom for Babasaheb Ambedkar is - Civil Liberty and Political Liberty. He called Civil Liberty not only important but imperative. In the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar, “Civil Liberty refers to (1) freedom of movement which is another name for freedom from arrest without due process of law (2) freedom of speech (which of course includes freedom of thought, freedom of reading, writing and discussion) and (3) liberty of action.”²⁰ On the other hand, in the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar, “Political liberty consists in the right of the individual to share in the framing of laws and in the making and unmaking of governments.”²¹

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Dr. Ambedkar's struggle is reflected in various clauses of the constitution. His role and contribution as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee made him the father of the Indian Constitution. Article 14 of the Constitution enumerates the principles of equality before the law or equal protection by law. Article 15 provides for equal social status for all citizens. According to this section, the state is directed not to discriminate only on the basis of caste, religion, caste, female, male, place of birth. Clause 2 of this Article states that no citizen shall be deprived of the right to enter shops, hotels, restaurants and places of public use and to use wells, water bodies, baths, roads and places of public gathering wholly or partly managed by the Government or open to the public. Article 16 states that there shall be no discrimination in public employment. Clause IV of this Article states that the State may, if it deems it necessary, provide for reservation in public posts or jobs for citizens of inferior classes. Abolition of untouchability is declared in Article 17 of the Constitution. Acting untouchable is a punishable offence. Article 46 states that the state shall improve the education and economic system of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and backward communities and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Also there are various protective goodwill provisions in different parts of the constitution.

Conclusion

In concluded we may say that B.R. Ambedkar fought against casteism and social inequality throughout his life. He openly opposed the Brahminical Hindu ideology and also campaigned against casteism and untouchability. He formed various organizations to awaken political consciousness among the untouchable Dalit class. He organized the 'Mahar' caste in the society of that time. His fight against social injustice continued even after independence. He did not play a significant role in the drafting of the Indian Constitution and for this reason Ambedkar is called the father of the Indian Constitution. A shining example of his establishment of social justice is the controversy over the Hindu Code Bill of 1951. He resigned from the Nehru cabinet due to conflicts with Hindu conservatives during the passage of this bill. Later, he contested elections on behalf of his own organization "All India Scheduled Caste Federation". But he failed to win. Finally, B.R. Ambedkar took the Scheduled Castes on the path of conversion. In 1956, several lakhs of Scheduled Castes people converted to Buddhism. After his conversion, Ambedkar said 'By discarding my

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ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn.' Thus ended a phase of the movement for the establishment of social rights and justice for the untouchables.

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