

The Socio-Political Struggle of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for Social Justice and Democratic Transformation

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Abstract—One of the pioneers of social justice, one of the figures who spoke out for the rights of the Dalit community or other backward or depressed classes was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He has suffered various social discriminations and exclusions during his lifetime. He victimized these discriminations and prejudices and dedicated his life to challenging injustice and promoting equality. He dedicated his life to improving the lives of the oppressed, humiliated, deprived and humiliated. He founded several organizations and movements aimed at securing the social and political rights of those poor low class people. B. R. Ambedkar demanded adequate political representation for this depressed class along with his advocacy of social equality and raised their concerns before the colonial government for separate representation. These are of activities and his commitment makes him great. He was also one of the prominent members of the Constituent Assembly. And he was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India. His role in preparing and shaping this draft was more important. He was able to have a lasting impact on the democratic and social structure of the nation.

Index Terms—Ambedkar, Socio-political struggle, social justice, Democracy, Dalit

I. INTRODUCTION

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was an Indian jurist, economist, social reformer and politician who headed the committee that drafted the Constitution of India based on the debates of the Constituent Assembly of India and the first draft of Sir Benegal Narsing Rau. Ambedkar was the Law and Justice minister of Jawaharlal Nehru's first cabinet. He later converted from Hinduism to Buddhism and led the Dalit Buddhist movement. After graduating from Elphinstone College, University of Bombay,

Ambedkar studied economics at Columbia University and the London School of Economics, and received doctorates in 1927 and 1923, two of a few Indian students to do so in the 1920s. At Columbia University, he was exposed to John Dewey and his pragmatism. He also trained in law at Gray's Inn, London. In his early career he was an economist, professor and lawyer. His later life was one of politics, where he did some campaigning and negotiating for partition, published journals, promoted political rights and social freedom for Dalits and helped establish the state of India. In 1956 he converted to Buddhism, and mass conversions of Dalits began in India.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even when the constitution of India gives a guarantee for equality and justice, caste discrimination, social exclusion, inequality of opportunities and social marginalization of the poor and the marginalized community is still prevalent. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar fought for social justice and democratic transformation in the social and political arenas through social change, constitutional reform and democratization to put democratic values on the agenda of the country. Many of the problems he fought to eradicate are still present. This chapter is about the socio-political dimension of Ambedkar's social revolution and how these ideas and reforms contribute to structural inequalities and how they are being observed in India today. It will also explore the relevance of his vision to strengthening democracy, protecting human rights, and promoting social equality in the face of ongoing socio-political challenges.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

The study has been motivated by some objectives. The following are the main objectives:

- To understand socio-political struggle of B.R Ambedkar for social justice.
- To analyze the impact of his contributions to social justice and the upliftment of marginalized communities.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The major objective of the present study is to know the ideas of social justice of B.R. Ambedkar, and his struggle and contribution to Indian society. So, to understand the problem, secondary sources are explored, such as articles, journals, books, newspaper, internet sources and theses of researchers.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Social justice is still the central issue in Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar was constantly concerned with social discrimination and inequality, and his work was in the field of education and research. Indian society has been largely under the influence of the Varna system, and caste-based discrimination has made some sections of the population more or less marginalized. The constitution and legal systems we have developed since independence have been supposed to promote equality and eradicate caste-based discrimination, but caste-based discrimination still exists in many forms. In this respect, Ambedkar's ideas and efforts for social justice continue to hold great influence today. This study aims to expose the significance of his socio-political struggle and its continuous contribution to the promotion of equality, dignity, and social inclusion in contemporary India.

VI. AMBEDKAR'S STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ambedkar was dedicated to social justice and uplifting oppressed communities. He understood that social inequality was based on the caste system and the caste system was the reason for the discrimination of the poor, and so he fought so hard for equal rights, dignity and opportunities for the poor and the

marginalized from the community. Social reform movements, public campaigns and political action were waged and the deprived classes were supported for all. Ambedkar believed social equality and justice were necessary for democracy to exist. Not only did he highlight caste-based discrimination, but his efforts were instrumental in the recognition of social justice and it became a reality. We recall some of his major contributions to social justice.

Bahiskrit hitkarini sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association), 1924

Dr B.R. Ambedkar always thought for the all-round development of depressed classes. So, to promote welfare of the depressed classes he founded the Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha on 20 July, 1924 in Bombay (now Mumbai). The motto of the Sabha was to "to educate, to organize and to agitate"¹. The Sabha circulated on leaflet also, and in that leaflet it emphasized on reducing the gap between touchable and untouchables for the greater interest of the nation.² Besides the above objectives, following objectives were also set forth:

- To promote the spread of education amongst the depressed classes.
- To spread the cultural consciousness amongst the depressed classes.
- Resolved to improve the economic condition of the depressed class.
- To create the environment of self-dependency.³

Chavdar Water Tank Satyagraha, 1927

The Chavdar Tank Satyagraha (Mahad Satyagraha) was one of the most important social movements led by Dr. Ambedkar. The satyagraha was started to fight for the right of the depressed classes or Dalits to access public resources, like water sources, which they were kept from accessing by caste discrimination. The tank was open to all irrespective

¹Ambedkar Rajratna, His speech on the occasion of 114th Birth Anniversary of Dr. B.R Ambedkar, 14 April, 2023.

²Moon, Basanta, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1991, p.31

³Ibid, p32.

of caste or religion and everyone could use it but upper caste Hindus did not let the depressed classes use the water of the tank.⁴ Dr. Ambedkar led thousands of the poor to the Chavdar Tank to claim their right to use the water of the tank. He defied untouchability and underlined the principle of equal citizenship.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar before the Simon Commission:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar submitted two memoranda before the Simon Commission, also known as the Indian Statutory Commission. On behalf of the Bahiskrit Hikarini Sabha, he presented a memorandum on 29 May, 1928, concerning the educational condition of the Depressed Classes in the Bombay Presidency. In this memorandum, Ambedkar reviewed the measures taken by the Bombay Government for the educational advancement of the backward classes and highlighted the shortcomings that continued to affect their progress. He also put forward a set of recommendations outlining the steps that the government should take to improve educational opportunities and ensure the welfare of the marginalized sections of society. The 4 (four) major recommendations proposed by the Sabha are discussed below:

- Unless the Compulsory Primary Education Act is abolished and the transfer of primary Education to the School Boards is stopped, the Sabha fears that education of the depressed classes will receive a great set back.
- Unless compulsion in the matter of Primary education is made obligatory and unless the admission to primary schools is strictly enforced conditions essential for educational progress of the Backward classes will not come into existence.
- Unless the recommendations made by the Hunter Commission regarding the education of the Mohammedans are applied to the depressed classes their educational progress will not be an accomplished fact.

⁴ Ambedkar Rajratna, His speech on the occasion of 114th Birth Anniversary of Dr. BR Ambedkar, Bhopal, 14 November, 2022

- Unless entry in the public service is secured to the depressed classes there will be no inducement for them to take education.⁵

In a second report he demanded joint electorate reservation of 22 seats out of 140 seats for the depressed classes, Dalit representation in the ministry, jobs in army, navy and opposed the demand of the Muslims for separate electorate. Dr. Ambedkar supported Simon Commission and associated with the commission⁶.

Round table conference of 1930 and 1931, London:

Round Table Conference for the first time was held in between 12.11.30 and 01.12.1931 and it was boycotted by the Congress. Dr. Ambedkar was invited as a representative of depressed classes in the Second Round Table Conference which was held in between 7 September 1931 to 1 December 1931. He demanded separate electorate for depressed classes.⁷

KALARAM TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT, 1930

The Kalaram temple in Nashik, Maharashtra, was off-limits to members of lower castes. Ambedkar, however, opposed it. Since the temple is open to the public, he thought everyone had the right to worship there. So, Ambedkar organized the people against the ban of entry of untouchables and decided to march to the Kalaram temple and around 15,000 volunteers gathered at the Kalaram Temple Satyagraha.⁸ It was one of the significant processions of Nasik. Of course, the then Bombay government imposed section 144 of the Civil Procedure Code

⁵ www.Vileveda.ambedkar.org visited in 18 November, 2023

⁶Ambedkar, B.R Dr., Ambedkar with the Simon Commission, Samyak Prakashan, 2019, New Delhi-2, p29

⁷Ray, Ravi, Dr. BR Ambedkar, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, 1991, p.120

⁸Singh, Jarnail, Socio-political Ideas of Dr. BR Ambedkar: Their Relevance in Modern Times, (Unpublished Thesis), Department of Political Science, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2018, p.63

around the temple and following the section several protesters were arrested by the government but it was a peaceful movement. Besides the government action they “faced hostile attack from the upper caste Hindus. The Kala ram Temple Satyagraha Movement continued for 3(three) years to assert their rights”⁹.

POONA PACT OF 1932

In September 1932, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi came to an accord known as the Poona Pact. Its origins can be traced back to the Communal Award, which was declared in August 1932 by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. This award gave the Depressed Classes and other communities, including Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and others, separate electorates. As stated in his book "Who were Untouchables," Ambedkar backed the idea because he believed that political representation was crucial to ensuring the rights and advancement of the underprivileged segments of society. He believed that caste discrimination required political remedies and that meaningful democracy could not be achieved without the participation of the Depressed Classes in the political process. Gandhi, however, opposed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. According to Gandhi, caste issue is a social issue. He argued that social reform and the transformation of hearts and minds of the people were necessary to address the problem of caste discrimination. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were adamant in their views. Despite their differing viewpoints, discussions between the two leaders eventually resulted in the Poona Pact, which replaced separate electorates with reserved seats for the Depressed Classes within a joint electorate system. The major provisions of the Pact are discussed below:

- A joint electorate arrangement was used to give the Depressed Classes reserved seats in provincial legislatures.
- Under the Communal Award, the number of seats set aside for the Depressed Classes in Provincial Legislative Assemblies was raised from 71 to 148.
- The Depressed Classes were granted reserved representation in the Central Legislature.

⁹Moon, Basanta, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, 1991, p.21

- A system of primary elections was introduced, whereby voters belonging to the Depressed Classes would first elect a panel of candidates, from which the final representative would be elected through the joint electorate.
- The system of reserved representation was to continue for a specified period, subject to future review and mutual agreement.
- Adequate representation of the Depressed Classes in public services was promised.
- Special efforts were to be made for the educational advancement of the Depressed Classes, including the provision of educational grants and other welfare measures.

Annihilation of Caste, 1936:

Caste system (as far as Indian society is concerned) is one of the most distinctive features of society. Caste system is a social stratification of India and according to history it shaped social relations and determined an individual's place and occupation and opportunities. Caste is closely linked to Hindu philosophy and religion. It is thought to have been created and sanctioned by god. As time went on caste got entangled into religion and social practices and this is the reason for the persistence of social injustice and prejudice. Dr. Ambedkar always fought for equality, justice and freedom of every person irrespective of caste, creed, sex or religion.

He was vehemently against the caste system, and it was a major obstacle to social equality and human dignity. In 1936 he was invited to address the annual conference of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal in Lahore but due to disagreements on the content of the speech, the invitation was withdrawn before the conference took place. But Ambedkar went on to publish the speech independently under the title "Annihilation of Caste" in 1936. It is one of his most important writings and it has given a strong critique of caste and it advocates a more just and egalitarian society. He argued that “Hindu religion has created Chaturvarna which provided the base for the caste system. Chaturvarna is based on hierarchically arranged and graded classes in Hindu society”¹⁰. According to Ambedkar caste has two aspects- firstly, it divided men into separate

¹⁰Ambedkar, BR, Annihilation of Caste, Prabhat

Prakashan, Patna, 2022, p.34

communities, and secondly, it places these communities in a hierarchical order. He found all as slaves of caste system but all slaves are not equal in status. It creates graded inequality. Therefore, it is difficult to get rid of caste system. The members of each caste guard zealously the interest of their caste, status, privileges, and prestige they hold in the graded social order. He argued that caste has ruined Hindus. The reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of Chaturvarna is impossible because the Varna system is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. It is incapable of sustaining itself by its own virtue and has an inherent tendency to degenerate into a caste system unless there is a legal sanction behind it which can be enforced against everyone trespassing his virtue.¹¹ Ambedkar's solution of this is the destruction of the caste system in order to achieve this objective (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity), the sense of religious sanctity behind caste and varna must be destroyed. According to Ambedkar, to destroy caste system ;

It was beyond reforms, has no social utility, against moral ideals and hence should be abolished through inter caste marriage, priesthood to all castes, urbanization, industrialization, legal and social reforms, constitutional guarantee of rights and believed that state socialism may help in its abolition.

VII. AS A MEMBER OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Bengal Legislative Assembly in July, 1946. But following the partition of Bengal he lost his membership because after partition it falls in the East Pakistan. Subsequently, he was elected from Bombay Presidency and elected as the Chairman of Drafting Committee on 29th August, 1947. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, in his remarkable speech on the problems of the Scheduled Castes in the All India Scheduled Castes Federation at Kanpur on 29th January, 1944 suggested that the Scheduled Castes people should share political power with Hindus and Muslims to improve the condition.¹² Only then they will be the

masters, and he expressed similar feelings at the election to the Drafting Committee in 1946 as well. He said, "I came into the Constituent Assembly with no greater aspiration than to safeguard the interest of the Scheduled Castes."¹³ When he became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee in 1946 he emphasized and "took initiative and very deliberately introduced the principle of reservation of Dalits in the Parliament, educational institutions and in government jobs."¹⁴ Dr. Ambedkar was a party to a general consensus in the Constituent Assembly that the term 'Backward Classes' would cover three main components, "the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the other Backward Classes."¹⁵ Dr. Ambedkar addressed himself to the task of securing social justice for all the backward classes.

VIII. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar played a significant role in the struggle against caste discrimination and social inequality in India.
- His philosophy of politics was based on liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. Ambedkar saw democracy as a political system and a social form of life based on human dignity.
- He was in charge of the development of the Constitution of India, which had constitutional and social safeguards for marginalized and downtrodden communities. He encouraged education, political participation, and economic empowerment as the only means to achieve social justice.
- Reform movements of Ambedkar were also very successful in uplifting Dalits and other socially excluded groups.
- The study explains that constitutional provisions alone are not a sufficient platform to address social and institutional challenges.
- In present society, caste-based discrimination, social exclusion, and inequitable opportunities still hinder the realization of Ambedkar's vision. Ambedkar's ideas are not only relevant but even

¹¹Ibid p.35

¹²Sablania, Mukesh Kumar, Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Constituent Assembly, an article published in (ed Rani Panwar) The Ambedkarite

Today, <https://ambedkaritoday.com> visited on 17 November'2023, p.45

¹³Constitution Assembly Debate, Vol-VII, p.122

¹⁴Ibid,2023, p. 124

¹⁵Constituent Assembly Debate, Vol VII, p.123

more relevant to the matter of social justice, human rights, and democratic governance today.

- We believe that Ambedkar's socio-political struggle continues to inform us that the struggle of Ambedkar has been an inspiration for people to be inclusive, just, and democratic in the future as well.

IX. CONCLUSION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's socio-political struggle is one of the most important towards social justice and democratic change in India. He worked hard to eradicate caste discrimination and bring about equality and ensure constitutional rights for marginalized communities and this was really the basis for a more democratic India. His idea of democracy has extended from the political system to social and economic equality, liberty, equality and fraternity being the basic values of a nation. While India has made much progress in terms of constitutional safeguards in terms of social reform and even the restoration of democracy, inequalities and discrimination continue to exist and the work of Ambedkar is never complete, so his ideas and philosophy have to be the basis for better democracy and human rights and for an equitable society. Therefore Ambedkar's legacy is still needed to establish a just India, inclusive India and to make it a sustainable one.

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