



DR. BABA SAHEB AMBEDKAR: UNTOUCHABILITY – A GLIMPSE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar is called the great fighter of social justice for the down-trodden mass. He ushered a new era in development of consciousness of untouchable mass and organized movement against untouchability. He was an unparalleled leader of down-trodden mass in India. He dedicated himself for the 'Dalit' and untouchable people and he was a vatarent leader of 'Dalit' movement. On the other hand, his educational status is excellent, high level and multifarious category. He is the father of Indian constitution. He was a politician, economist, sociologist, anthropologist, journalist, lawyer, freedom fighter, social reformer, humanist and so on. Actually, he was a prominent architect of modern India. In socio-political concept, Ambedkar is recognized as a 'Keidoscopic images' personality. He appeared in India in vulnerable situation when the life of Indians was in a crisis period and unstable political circumstances. In such stage, his organizational activities and in the field of socio-politics his reformative movement had become immortal. He raised the voice for establishing equality irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religion. He was the prominent exponent of the exploited class and he was the victim of exploitation, oppression, suppression, social injustice. Inhuman activities and torture were imposed on left behind mass. He was an active pioneer who vehemently protested against the injustice of the lower strata of Indian society. He had been fighting for social justice and wanted to abolish the untouchability of the society. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, a great leader played a powerful role to abolish untouchability. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was the worthy follower of the leader, social reformer, Jyotiba Phule.

Dr. Ambedkar came off a poor but respectable family. He was born in Mahar community, in 1891, 14th April. His father was Ramji Malaji, a teacher in military school and his mother was Bhima Bai. It is heard that Maharashtra is named by the name of Mahar community. It is, however, in Indian stratified society, there are four Varnas (Chaturvarna) like Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Out of these four Varnas there is another Varna which is called 'Untouchable'. The status of Mahar is considered as fifth Varna. In Indian caste structure, Mahar community is recognized in fifth Varna, the untouchable community. Ill behavior, inhuman torture, mal-treatment, tremendous oppression, restraints and suppression were imposed on the Mahar community by the so called Brahmin community. Baba Saheb had faced these situations. Even he was hated by his class mates and teachers except one who belonged to Brahmin by caste and he had paid sympathy to him and offered his title 'Ambedkar'.¹ The teacher realized the versatile talent of Bhimrao Ramji- Baba Saheb. All the evils, nasty, brutas and inhuman behaviours paved the way for collocious figure of Baba Saheb to eradicate the injustice- untouchability and to establish the social justice. He hammered the Varna system, caste based society and he wanted to liberate the oppressed class from social prejudice which was cherished century after century. He also struck out the route of Manu Smriti and headed to eradicate Varna system and creator of casteism who hoodwinked and swindled the mass by preaching unscientific argument, the mal-interpretation of Varna and Caste system.²

Jyotiba Phule was the fore-runner regarding untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar was inspired by Jyotiba Phule. Dr. Ambedkar realized like Jyotiba Phule, until the lower strata of the society is to seize the political power they cannot dominate over the upper strata of the society. Jyotiba Phule, the Maharshtrian middle class, social revolutionary whose death centenary was celebrated in 1989-90 is regarded by both 'Dalit' and radical non Brahmins alike as their fore-runner.³ In this connection, the following statement added regarding injustice against Dalit commented by Dr. Ambedkar: "we do not want a little place





in Brahmin alley. We want the rule of the whole country. Change of heart, liberation and education will not end our state of exploitation. When we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle of this giant man will come the tidal wave of revolution.....to eradicate this injustice against Dalt, they themselves must become rulers. This is the people's democracy.⁴

Dr. Ambedkae was a renounced strong powerful leader, the friend, philosopher, guide of untouchable class – Dalit and he published the exploitation, suppression, torture and problems of the Dalit class in his famous patrika “Mook Nayak” (Leader of the Dump). He vividly highlighted depression of Dalit in this patrika. From the very beginning of the publication “the very first issue was compared Hindu society with a tower which has several storeys without a ladder or an entrance in which one was to die in the storey in which one was born”.⁵ Ambedkar had enmeshed and published the different problems of the Dalit in his patrika. He said : “.....that Indian freedom meant guarantees of equal status, offering every man an opportunity to rise in the scale of right and creating conditions favourable to his advancement. The Swaraj wherein no fundamental rights were guaranteed for depressed classes would not be a Swaraj to them. It would, indeed, be a new slavery for them.” Again, in 1927, in “Bahiskrita Bharat” patrika, in his editorial column he depicted: “ if Tilak had been born among the untouchable he would have raised the slogan ‘Swaraj is my birth right’, but he would have raised the slogan ‘Annihilation of Untouchability’ in my birth right.” In the year 1927, Gandhiji organized ‘Dandi March’ and he submitted the demands of the ‘very Sudra’ (Dalit) to the British government. Simultaneously Dr. Ambedkar conveyed a session of Mahar community and he declared two important issues, 1. Equal rights 2. Eradication of castism. He vehemently criticized the Manusmriti and said, “It is a monumental historic repudiation of human equality in India.” In the mean time, Dr. Ambedkar organized Mahar Satyagraha Movement for right drinking water and to worship in the temple for Mahar class. Manusmriti was also burnt in this movement. The leaders of Maharashtra’s Satya Sodhak Movement also helped Ambedkar in this regard.

2. UNTOUCHABILITY: DEBATE BETWEEN DR. AMBEDKAR AND GANDHIJI

Controversy appeared between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji regarding Varnas system- untouchability. According Dr. Ambedkar, the Hindu scheme of social structure based on the four Varnas or Chaturvarna breeds inequality and has been parent of the caste system and untouchability which are merely forms of inequality. On the other hand, Gandhiji said that untouchability is connected with traditional Varna system. According to him, if Varna system is tree, then untouchability is like parasite. To eradicate the Varna system means to make a political difference between Varna and A-Varna. But Dr. Ambedkar rejected the concept of Varna system of Gandhiji. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized if Varna system is inevitable part of Hindu society then Hindu Varna system can no longer be imagined without untouchability. As untouchability can socially differentiate between Varna and A-Varna, so Varna system can also not retain if this difference is abolished. Actually, Gandhiji was not in favor of abolition of untouchability but he was the reformer of Varna system. Ambedkar wanted to reform the Hindu society but this reform would be materialized by state endeavor. Ambedkar criticized the Hindu Brahmin’s ideology. To abolish this system was the object of Ambedkar. If Hindu Brahmanism is abolished the Varna system also abolished simultaneously. According to Ambedkar: “The real method of breaking up the casts system was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notion on which caste was founded.⁶ In 1929, to consider the Dalit mass and social status of them, Ambedkar submitted a demand for special representation of Dalit class. In this demand, he argued that Dalit and untouchable class are the same category. In 1930-32 ‘Gol Table Session’ in London, Ambedkar demanded separate representation for Dalit. As per demand of Ambedkar, McDonald declared ‘Communal Award’ and arranged separate representation for Dalit in assembly. But Gandhiji made hunger strike against this award. Gandhiji used the term ‘Harijan’ instead of untouchability and as a result of which he established an organization ‘Harijan Sevak Sangha’. The aim of this organization was to abolish the untouchability. But Ambedkar did not support it, because of the fact that this organization was controlled by the upper Hindu caste and it was also organ of Congress party.





Challenging this organization, Dr. Ambedkar established 'Samata Sainik Dal'. Ambedkar said Gandhiism has made full use of religion as opium to pull the people into false belief and false security.

Gandhiji expressed his opinion in "India of my dreams". "Untouchability is the product not of the caste system but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack of untouchability is thus an attack upon high and lowness. The movement untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream it will resolve into the two Varna, Dharma, the four divisions of the society is complimentary of the other and non superior or inferior to the other, is as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other." But Ambedkar was a social prophet of the untouchables. He denounced the Monstrous inequalities and outrageous calumnies which Brahmanical Hinduism has heaped upon the untouchables and the birthness of his fury against Hinduism is apparent in his work.⁷

"Gandhiji, a Vaisya, born into a Gujeati Benia family, was the latest in a long tradition of privileged caste reformers and their organizations Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828, Swami Dayanand Saraswati who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, Swami Vivekananda who established the Rama Krishna Mission in 1897 and a host of other, more contemporary reformist organizations." And "Pulling the Ambedkar Gandhiji debate into context for those unfamiliar with its history and its protagonists require detours into their very different political, strategic tories.....Their differences were (and remain) irreconcilable. Both are deeply loved and often deified their followers.....Ambedkar was Gandhi's most formidable adversary. He challenged him not just politically and intellectually, but also morally. To have excised Ambedkar from Gandhiji's story, which is this story we all grew upon, is a travesty. Equally, to ignore Gandhi while writing about Ambedkar is to do Ambedkar a disservice, because Gandhi loomed over Ambedkar's world in myriad and unwonderful ways."⁸

Gandhiji, the politician was a successful humbug, a tory by birth as well as by faith. He feared that to leave democracy and freedom in such conservative hands would be great mistake that democrats make. Again Dr. Ambedkar said, Gandhiji stood for the caste system and was a fanatical Hindu upholding the Hindu religion. Gandhiji did not want to abolish caste system. He said: there was nothing sinful about it. On the other hand, Ambedkar said that nothing can help Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu faith of their odious and vicious dogma of the caste system. Ambedkar criticized Brahmanism, the perversities and hypocrisies of Brahmanism which, to him, was a wicked and mischievous agent of the social exploitation of the backward and untouchable section of the Hindu society.⁹

3.CONCLUSION

According to Ambedkar, social justice is nothing but in the context of social and economic equal rights and equal privileges. The route of social injustice is non existence of equal rights and equal privileges to all. His object was to achieve unexploited class and non dominance by a particular class i.e. Brahmanism. He strongly denied the unscientific, unreasonable and inhuman concept that a particular class (Brahmanism) will impose hegemony over large number of people in socio-political, economic and religious field. He strongly opposed the Varna system – Caste system and wanted to abolish the untouchability. His object was to get equal rights, equal opportunity and social status and a justified and rightful scope for expressing opinion and grievances. He wanted to establish such type of society where no prejudice like caste system and Chaturvarna exist. He was astounded to realize the dark side of religious sermon four Varnas. He indeed, opposed 'The Brahmanyabaad'. It is said in the Hindu dharma, Brahman was born from the mouth, Kshatriya was born from the arms, Vaisya was born from knee and the Sudra was born from the leg. It is a strange ridicule, obnoxious and unscientific.¹⁰ "Dr. Ambedkar would undoubtedly find a unique place in such a record of great luminaries. He must be recognized not only for a great champion of the depressed classes and a maker of the Indian Constitution but also as a great scholar, an intellectual, an educationist, politician, labour leader and as a religious leader. Great men of its time were products of history in so far as the struggle for freedom moulded their lives considerably, and in-turn, it is these persons who moulded history."¹¹ Ambedkar was a great son of India who created the new history of India. His life was revolutionary one as he





fought against evils of our social system, blind faith and superstition and also to liberate the down-trodden masses of India.¹² In this connection, a question can automatically crop up why the Manusmriti was burnt by the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. The Brahmins are the sermons prescribed by Manu are cited here that 1. Sudra (untouchable class) is born 'Das'. He cannot be emancipated from Das. 2. Sudra has no right to read the Veda, not only that it will be illegal if Veda is read or uttered by Sudra. 3. Sudra has no right for savings. 4. If Sudra possesses some money, Brahmin has right to seize it. 5. Oats or Offal is the food of Sudra. 6. Sudra's killing and women's killing is very very little offense for Brahmin. 7. If any Brahmin kills the Sudra it is considered like a killing of cat/dog/frog/crow etc. 8. If a Sudra abuses a Brahmin his tongue will be cut down and such type of 'Bidhan'/'Sermons' are prescribed by Manu (who are Illegal son) for untouchable class in Manusmriti. Dr. Ambedkar observed and realized the inhuman torture of untouchable class and he became furious against the Manusmriti.¹³ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was born to an untouchable family, like millions of other untouchables, he suffered greatly under the overpowering tyranny and treachery of the cruel majority- the caste Hindus. The touch, the mere sight, even the approach of untouchable was considered a crime punishable under the code of Manu. That traumatic and frustrating experiences in childhood produce lasting effects on the personality of the individual.¹⁴ Harold. J. Laski expressed his opinion that Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts were of a revolutionary nature. Ambedkarism is anti-dote to all castes, creeds especially to Brahmanism. Ambedkarism also hates formulas and discards conventions.....The Ambedkarism is crusade, a rebel and a true stealer of fires.¹⁵

There is no gain saying that we brought up and bred up in a communal environment as we share the aspirations and ambitions of that community.¹⁶ From birth Ambedkar was grown up through the victim of untouchable environment. Ambedkar was eclipsed by this perverted environment.¹⁷ For centuries, they live, nay, were forced to live, as the undergoes of the caste of Hindus, Dr. Ambedkar was the first of these dumb millions, to become a first-rate Indian politician. He stood second to none, shining as a morning star in the political sky of India.¹⁸ The great scholars like Hegel, Marx, Max Weber remarked that the socio-economic development had been stagnated due to the caste system. Dr. Ambedkar has been searching out routes of caste system and Chaturvarna and its evils in his book Annihilation of Caste.¹⁹ "Genuine merit and courage and scholarship- wherever they exist find their fullest expression however much they are suppressed. The life and mission of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar- is an inspiring Saga to the down-trodden, a revolt against the major cruelty a thunderbolt to the orthodox Hindu who wants to save guards the caste system (Varnasram Dharma) and the code of Manusmriti.²⁰

Dr. Ambedkar's name will be right down in history as a great liberator of the down-trodden and exploited section. But not only this vision, but also the vision of Ambedkar was socio-economic development for all sections of Indians, poor and deprived masses. Ambedkar said, "if I fail to do away with the abominable thralldom and inhuman injustice under which the class into which I was born has been with graving I will put an end to my life with bullet."²¹ As a 'Father of Constitution' he introduced the abolition of untouchability in our constitution.

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