



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Leader of Voiceless -A Dream of Casteless Social System unfulfilled, yet the legacy remains

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Abstract:

Human Rights represent one of the most proficient viewpoints in the contemporary world, but for India, the idea is not novel. The very idea of Human rights is not entirely western in its origin and neither it is modern. Dr. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar was a supreme social architect who viewed law as the tool for creating a sensible social order in which the growth of self would be in harmony with the development of society. His approach finds a similar chord in the writings of Roscoe Pound. Human rights are those minimal rights by virtue of which one enjoys maximum natural rights against the State. However, In the times of economic globalization, where being powerful and rich has become the supreme goal in life, Human rights promote a potent discourse that searches to overcome divisiveness to unite people of various cultural and religious groups in single movement expressing human values and the Caste Annihilation was one of the distant dreams of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar which remained unfulfilled till his death, yet his legacy remains.

1. Human Rights and India

In India, Rig Veda refers to three civil liberties of Body, Dwelling house and life. Mahabharata described the civil liberty of individual in a political state long ago. The concept of dharma was unarguably the rule of law. Chanakya in his famous political book "Arthshashtra"reintroduced not only civil and legal rights formulated by Manu but also inserted number of economical rights. The ideal of bygone era that remained in the realization of the millions of Indians has been the welfare and happiness of all.¹ The other ideal that survived in the minds of people of India is that of the whole world being one family.²

In ancient times, people fought against tyrant rulers. Later on, people established the concept of human rights expressively through Magna Carta of 1215, Petition of Rights of 1628, Bill of Rights of 1688, American Bill of Rights of 1791 and the French Declaration of Rights of Man of 1789. In the subsequent events of social change, human rights became the milestone for seeking protection against the tyrants, upper caste or rich and powerful. In ancient Indian civilization, during the Vedic period of brahminical society rights of individuals were recognized through higher moral values of dharma.

2. Distortion of Human Rights in India

With the invasion of foreigners in India, the history and civilization of indigenous people in India began to distort the ideas of rights and responsibilities. Gradually, victory and enslavement won by force and fraud were justified and selective human killing were based on the principle of might is right. Gradually, the doctrine of karma and theory of transmigration of soul were cunningly formulated to perpetuate inequality. People became victim of rigid contradictions and caste and religious acts which were beyond the limits of the civil society and became sacrosanct to them. During the Buddha period, caste system was rejected by the followers of Jainism and Buddhism and

¹Sarveshammangalambhavatu, sarvebhavantusukhina.

²VasudhaivaKutumbakam

they practiced non-violence, non-hatred, and friendliness of all. The Human rights jurisprudence surged new heights in this era. Thus, it is very much evident that ancient Indian jurisprudence took a stand for enhancing and promoting equality, freedom and liberty for mankind.

With invasion of British, there was annihilation of human rights. They plundered India not only economically but politically, culturally and spiritually also. It took years for India to come to a concrete movement in form of freedom struggle for claiming human rights of people who came together to claim independence.

3. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Early life and Transition

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's father RamjiSakpal and both his grandfathers were soldiers in the British Army. They were Mahars from Konkan, then a part of Bombay Presidency and at that time a place for national politics. It was a land which gave India two of most prominent Brahmin congress leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale who incidentally was Gandhiji's mentor. Ambedkar was born on 14th April 1891 near Indore as the 14th and last child of his parents whose mother died when he was only 2 years of age. As a child, Ambedkar was particularly distressed by the story of the killing and dismembering the 'low-born' Karna. As a child, Ambedkar would argue with his father about moralities shown in both Mahabharata and Ramayana.

As a child in several schools, Ambedkar was introduced to caste prejudices and insults and humiliation to untouchables. He was not allowed to seat with upper caste boys, he couldn't drink water in their tap, and neither could he learn Sanskrit. It is pleasant irony that later, the progressive maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad gave him a scholarship of Rs.25 a month to complete his graduation and travel abroad to Columbia University in New York. It was here that he wrote his first ideas on caste and social system in which he argued that caste can't be equated with race or class, but it was a unique social category in itself.³ When he returned to India, he faced severe caste discrimination against him once again.

4. Emergence of a "Mook Nayak" and his views on Social System

As National freedom movement began and upper class Hindu reformers started wooing Untouchables, the first all India Depressed Classes conference was held in Bombay in 1917. Ambedkar stayed far apart from these meetings as he believed that this public solicitude for untouchables was a way of controlling of untouchables by privileged classes.

Ambedkar soon realized that the caste problem would only be complicated further unless Untouchables were able to organize, mobilize and become a political constituency with their own representatives. Ambedkar began to toy with the idea of separate electorate for untouchables. During first All India Depressed class conference organized by him in Nagpur, he agreed that no untouchable representative chosen by a privileged class can genuinely work against chaturvarna.

During the Mahad conference also, Ambedkar returned to the theme of Equality. He is said to have quoted "Men may not all be equal, but equality was the only possible governing principle because the classification and assortment of human society was impossible"

Ambedkar soon realized that within the geographical demarcation of a political constituency, the untouchables would always be a minority and would never be in a position to elect a candidate of their own choice. He demanded separate electorate for untouchables and their right to vote for general candidates too for 10 years. But after Mahatma Gandhi's threat to fast until death, Ambedkar had to back down and he signed Poona Pact with him. Untouchables instead of separate electorate got reserved seats in general constituencies.

³ Castes in India: Their mechanism, Genesis and Development

5. B.R. Ambedkar, Human Rights and Contemporaries

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the most significant contributors to the human rights of this sub-continent. He continued to struggle for human rights in all the sessions of three round table conferences held in London. He thought that depressed classes welcomed swaraj with open hands, but were apprehensive that the upper caste will resume injustice after independence. So he demanded separate electorate for untouchables.

With the demand for assured political representation for the untouchables, Ambedkar makes it clear that it is the demand related with human right. According to him, the socio-religious disabilities have dehumanized untouchables and their interests at the stake are therefore interests of humanity.

After the Poona pact, Gandhiji diverted all his energies and time towards eradication of untouchability. Untouchables were given patronizing name called “”HariJan””.⁴Ambedkar saw all this as Congress’s ploy to “Kill Untouchables by Kindness”.

Although Ambedkar had a formidable intellect, he did not possess the sense of timing, the duplicity and the craftiness required to be a politician. The ploy of opening doors for untouchables in temples worked for Congress and Ambedkar opposed the very idea of submissive and regressive politics.

Roscoe Pound, An eminent American jurist of our century said once;

“Law in the sense of the body of authoritative grounds of or guides to judicial decisions and administrative action has for its subject matter, the expectations of claims or wants held or asserted by individual human beings or groups of human beings which affect their relations or determine their conduct.”

Ambedkar said that slavery doesn’t mean merely a legalized form of subjection but a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purposes which control their conduct. This uncanny and unintentional resemblance of his thoughts with Roscoe Pound is mesmerizing.

6. Caste Annihilation a distant dream in India

When Jat-Pat Todakmandal invited Dr. Ambedkar for their conference and later pushed back their invitation, Ambedkar couldn’t publish his ideas which he had written for this occasion. It was published much later on.

Ambedkar thoughts were not superficial. He thought that the real method of breaking up the caste system was not to bring around inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which caste was founded.

He believed that there was a difference between caste system and racial system. According to him, the caste system does not demarcate the racial system. The caste system is a social division of the people of same race. The caste system has created groups which are warring for their own interests. It is like Brahmins fighting for their own and non-Brahmins fighting for their own interests.

According to him, caste has killed public spirit and destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste according to him has made the public opinion impossible.

The book was called “Annihilation of Caste” and in it Ambedkar’s thoughts on social system of caste and his criticism for Hinduism are evident. Ambedkar did not have enough money to print his major work Buddhism, The Buddha and His Dhamma, before he died.

⁴ “Hari” means God and “Jan” means People so in translation they were called “Children of God”

When Babasaheb recommended reservation for lower caste, he did it for a limited period for 10 years. Politicians continued it for their political purpose for so many years and the political game for it continues. Ambedkar believed that Equality may be a fiction, but nonetheless one must accept it as governing principle. Dr. Ambedkar was realistic and pragmatic.

7. The dream unfulfilled and the road ahead

At the center of Ambedkar's approach to democracy was the question of how to ensure that all minorities along with Untouchables could successfully bargain for adequate protections. He was suspicious of the powerful community's stand and intentions to bridge caste divide and include inclusive and democratic social system and rightly so. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a crime is committed against a Dalit by a Non-Dalit every sixteen minutes. Almost every day, more than four untouchable women are raped by Touchables. It is ironic that 14th century built BabriMasjid , supposedly built on the birthplace of Lord Rama in Ayodhya, was demolished by Hindu storm troopers on 6th December, 1992, Ambedkar's death anniversary, the country remains divided. Hate crimes like mob-lynching are growing day by day. Human rights violations have become common, several and have increased significantly in different forms. In India, we don't caste a vote but vote a caste. The dream of Baba Saheb related to caste annihilation remains unfulfilled, yet his legacy and quench for equality remains, and the struggle continues.

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