

## Ambedkar's Thoughts on Social Reforms and Justice- A Kaleidoscopic View

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### Abstract

India is a land of many leaders, saints and sages but among them some are remembered as the messiah of humanity who lived and died for the cause of mankind. Dr. Ambedkar is one of them who worked for the downtrodden and untouchables tirelessly throughout his life. His own life experiences, which he had throughout his life being a member of low caste, inspired him to work for abolishing the prevailing caste system and untouchability in Hindu religion. He considered the caste system as the greatest evil in Hindu religion. He wanted to reform restrictive Hindu social system, which ascribes status to a man on basis of his birth in a particular low or high caste. He was not against Hindu society but opposed caste system vehemently. He was of the opinion that caste inhibits the social and economic organization of the society. So, they must be broken. Being inspired by this feeling he accepted Buddhism. Dr. Ambedkar's concept of social reform stands for liberty, equality and fraternity of all human beings. He stood for a social system, which is based on right relations between man and man in all spheres of life. He was true rationalist and humanist, didn't approve any type of hypocrisy, injustice and exploitation of man by man in name of religion. He stood for a religion, which is based on universal principles of morality and applicable in to the all times, to all the countries and to all the races. He has a deep faith in man and in his powers. According to him he himself is responsible for his miseries. As a responsible human being it is his duty to mitigate his own woes, slavery and poverty. Today our nation is engrossed with communalism, terrorism, separatism, corruption, inequality that every stream of development has been hindered. So there is a great need to understand and implement the ideas of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar. The paper highlights the discrepancies in Ancient Indian caste system, need of emancipation of dalits and their empowerment and dire need of reforms in the society thereby achieving social equality.

“A people and their religion must be judged by social standards based on social ethics. No other standard would have any meaning if religion is held to be necessary good for the wellbeing of the people.” These are the words of Dr. Ambedkar for the ideal society for which he strived his whole life. He waged a war against the unjust Hindu social structure. The Hindu social structure was based on the theory of Chaturverna that divides the Hindu society into four parts namely, Brahmins, Kashastriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The system of Chaturverna limits the opportunities a person have for earning an honorable living. According to Hindus, the four castes came from different parts of Brahman. The highest castes are Brahmins were created from the head of Brahman. They study and teach the Vedas. In Hindu society they are considered the best of humankind. The next caste is kashastriyas, who are created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. They protect the creatures created by God. The Vaishyas were created from the thighs of Brahman. They are expected to meet the material needs of the community. The shudras were

created from the Brahman's feet and they are supposed to serve all other groups. The people who came after Shudras are called Antyaja. They are namely shoemakers, jugglers, the basket and shield makers, the sailors, fisherman, the hunters of animals and of birds and weavers. They render various kinds of services to the caste Hindus. The four caste Hindus do not live together with them in one place. The people called Hadi, Candala, Badhatau are not reckoned among any caste. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by occupations. In fact they are considered like illegitimate child.

Henceforth, different profession, barriers of provinces, varying ways of living, different superstitions, and customs broke up the main four castes and further led to sub-castes. The untouchables were from the lowest strata of Hindu society and were condemned as untouchables by caste Hindus down the century. Ambedkar himself was brought up in the surrounding of an orthodox and rigid Hindu family that was divided on religious, castes, communal, and regional lines. He complained that Hindu society was just like a tower, which had many storeys without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which he was born.

Ambedkar made ceaseless efforts for the removal of untouchability and material progress of untouchables. From 1924 onwards, he led the movements of untouchables till the end of his life. He dared to burn Manusamriti the most religious book of Hindus to establish the right of untouchables to take water from cawdar tank on December 20th, 1927 at Mahad. Then again he motivated them to refuse the duty of carrying the dead animals and removing their skin. The minor and major motive of these resolutions was to foster among touchables self-esteem self respect and to strike a blow at Hindu social order. It aimed at making Hindus do their dirty jobs themselves. The history of revolt against the established social order of Hindus originated in Bombay, but it spread to all parts of india. He carried out his fight on political as well as religious fronts. He wanted the untouchables to have the right to enter a Hindu temple. In 1929, the Parvati temple entry Satyagrah was organized at Poona wherein the unarmed untouchables and caste Hindu participants were attacked and injured. After this there was a famous Kalaram temple entry at Nasik. This satyagrah was carried out from 1930 to 1935, but when obduracy of the orthodox Hindu did not relent, Ambedkar made his resolve before the public though he was born a Hindu, he would not die as a Hindu. He fulfilled this promise by embracing Buddhism till his death. The main aim of the temple entry Satyagraha was to make the entry possible in the temple for untouchables. He firmly believed that the progress of the nation could not be realized without first removing untouchability.

How can untouchability be removed? Untouchability is the indication of slavery of entire Hindu society. If the untouchables find themselves chained by the caste Hindus, the caste Hindus themselves live under the slavery of scriptures. Therefore emancipation of untouchables automatically involved emancipation of Hindu society as a whole. Ambedkar warns nothing worthwhile can be created on the bases of caste. We can build neither a nation nor morality on this basis. Therefore, a casteless society must be created. Ambedkar believed that education would greatly contribute to improvement of the untouchability. He always exhorted his followers to reach excellence in the field of knowledge. Knowledge is liberating force. Education makes man enlightened, makes him aware of his self-respect and also enables him to live his life better materially. One of the causes of the degradation of the untouchables was that they were denied the right of education. Ambedkar criticized the British policy on education for not adequately encouraging education among lower castes. He

felt that even under the British rule education continued mainly to be an upper caste monopoly. Therefore, he mobilized the lower castes and the untouchables to attain education. They were given scholarships for education abroad. He wanted that they should be given both liberal and technical education. He was opposed to education under religious auspices. He warned that only secular education could instill the values of liberty and equality among the students.

Another very important remedy, which Ambedkar upheld, was that untouchables should free themselves of the village community and its economic bondage. In the traditional setup the untouchables were bound to specific occupations. They were dependent upon the caste Hindus for sustenance. Even for the meagre returns they had to submit themselves to the domination of the caste Hindus. Ambedkar was aware of the economic dimension of their servitude. Therefore he always insisted that they should stop doing the traditional work. Instead they should acquire new skills and start new professions. Education would enable them to get employment. There was no point in remaining dependent on village economy. With the growing industrialization, there were greater opportunities in the cities. Once their dependence on caste Hindus is over, they can easily throw away the psychological burden of being untouchables. In realistic evaluation of the villages, Ambedkar graphically describes them as a 'sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism'.

Therefore, the earlier the untouchables become free of village bondage, the better. Even if they had to live in villages, they should stop doing their traditional work and seek new means of livelihood. The mainstay of Ambedkar argument was that the oppressed classes must generate self-respect among themselves. The best policy of their uplift was the policy of self-help. He did not believe in social reform on the basis of humanitarianism, sympathy, philanthropy etc. Equal status and just treatment was a matter of right and not of pity. The downtrodden should assert and win their rights through conflict. His advice to his people was "no lasting progress can be achieved unless we put ourselves through a threefold process of purification. We must improve the general tone of our demand, retune of our pronunciation, and revitalize our thoughts. We will attain self elevation only if we learn self help, regain self respect and gain self knowledge." As a step in this direction, Ambedkar attaches much importance to political participation of oppressed classes. He repeatedly emphasized that in context of colonialism it had become imperative that untouchables gain political rights by organizing themselves politically. He claimed that by attaining political power, untouchables would be able to protect safeguards and sizeable share in power, so that they can force certain policies on the legislature. Therefore he formed political organization of the untouchables. His writings and activity greatly contributed to the resurgence of the untouchable community. He created a sense of political awareness among the downtrodden. This resulted in emergence of dalit power in Indian society. He established an organization the Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha. The key words of his organization were "Educate, Agitate and Organize". The aims of the sabha were four in number as follows:

1. To promote the spread of education among the depressed class.
2. To promote the spread of culture among the depressed classes.
3. To advance and improve the economic condition of the depressed classes.
4. To represent the grievances of depressed classes.

Another landmark in the history of the untouchables was with the foundation of a new political party by the name of Independent Labour Party. The purpose was to strengthen the position of untouchables in the politics. Pleading for his community's

share in political power and swaraj he said, “We ourselves cannot remove grievance unless we get political power in our hands it is only in swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power without which there is no salvation for us”. As a leader of opposition Dr. Ambedkar played a very important and constructive role in Bombay Legislature. With his ardent efforts and even standing against Gandhi he was able to get the most historical pact the Poona pact. According to this depressed classes were who were deprived of separate electorates and the double vote and its place a joint electorate of a single vote was adopted. The poona pact settled the very important controversy about leadership. This pact brought Ambedkar in the limelight and as great leader. Not only had he worked hard for untouchables but also for the betterment and progress of women also. Dr. Ambedkar criticized the traditional and conservative values. He strongly criticized the degradation of women in Indian society. He believed that women should be entitled to equal status with men and they must have right to education. He lamented that the Hindu religion had deprived women of the right to property.

All his efforts and dream came true when he was appointed as chairman of the constitution’s drafting committee after independence. Ambedkar’s struggle bore fruit in his own life time. Dr. Ambedkar’s most important contribution to Indian constitution may be seen in the area of fundamental rights, strong central government and protection of minorities. He attempted to incorporate many safeguards for the minorities, including definite representation in executive. He was successful in creating provision regarding political reservations in legislation and the appointment of special officer for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Even in Hindu code Bill which he prepared he took care that a women should get a share in parents property and even provision for divorce. Ambedkar was not only a political leader and social reformer but also a scholar and thinker. His thinking was based on deep faith in the goals of equality and liberty. Ambedkar’s personal suffering, his constant attention to the problem of bringing about equality for the downtrodden and untouchables forms the basis of his writings and his work.

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