Ambedkar's Struggle for Empowerment of Downtrodden

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Ambedkar, acknowledged as a crusader for the rights of the depressed classes in India was a literary genius, an eminent educationist, a political philosopher and a competent parliamentarian. His whole life was devoted for social transformation of the Hindu society by strengthening the social life of the marginalized and the excluded. The present study attempts to explore Ambedkar's educational vision & analyze his struggle for the upliftment of the downtrodden. He emphasized education as a key instrument of liberation from oppression from Hindu caste-patriarchy structures and was the capable of establishing a new social order. His attempts to abolish the existing caste system were not theoretical but he attacked practically to the problems of untouchability. He advocated a society based on reason, and not on prevailing atrocious traditions of caste system. He made path breaking contributions as a campaigner of human rights for the untouchables. He launched the social movement for the annihilation of caste system and reconstruction of caste-less Indian Society. He ceaselessly fought for the betterment and upliftment of the oppressed classes. Without Ambedkar's consistent struggle and intervention to bring about some concrete measures for empowerment of the downtrodden, they would have been unable to their rightful place in nation.

Key words: Downtrodden, dalit, education, empowerment, upliftment

"It is the education which is the right weapon to cut the social slavery and it is the education which will enlighten the downtrodden masses to come up and gain social status, economic betterment and political freedom"

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a distinguished nationalist, political thinker, consummate scholar, notable statesman, social reformer and revolutionary with impressive ideas who stood up for scientific, social and educational causes in India. Affectionately known as Babasaheb, was one of the most memorable sons of India who gave new dimensions to deprived Indian society. He was the great Indian Constitution maker and was one of the principal nation-builders of modern India.

Dr. Bhimro Rao Ambedkar was born in 1891 to an untouchable school teacher in the British Army. He was highly educated, Ph.D. from Columbia University (1917), D.Sc. from London School of Economics and Bar-At- Law for Gray's Inn, London (1923). Dr. Ambedakar known as a crusader for the rights of the depressed classes of India was a literary genius, an eminent educationist, a political philosopher and an able parliamentarian. According to Kumar Keshava P. (2010) Ambedkar's political philosophy has a great potential in mediated both liberal and communitarian traditions of the west. He connected the individual and community based on morality. Ingle M.R. (2010) found that the Ambedkar's philosophy intended to give life to those who were disowned, at elevating those who are suppressed, and ennobling those who were downtrodden and granting liberty, equality and justice to all irrespective of their castes. Democratic socialism is the keynote of his political thought and constitutionalism is the only way to achieve it (Ray I.A., 2011). Ambedkarism will be remembered as the great instrument for social change (Ray MN., 2010).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the educational vision of Bhim Rao Ambedkar.
2. To assess the Ambedkar's struggle for the empowerment of downtrodden.
3. To examine Ambedkar's contribution for upliftment of the downtrodden.

METHODOLOGY

The present study attempts to analyze Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar's struggle for the upliftment of the downtrodden. It discusses the major steps taken by him for eradication of untouchability and restoration of equal rights and justice to the marginalized.

The researcher used historical method of research for the study. Both primary & secondary sources were explored for collecting relevant data of the study. Authenticity & validity of the content were established through external & external criticism of data. Interpretation of the data was done through content analysis to establish facts & for determining trends that data suggested.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Ambedkar's Vision of Education

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was an educational Pragmatist. His educational philosophy stresses the development of person and his environment. He was highly influenced by the John Dewey's philosophy of education. He emphasized education as one of the basic need for human. According to him education is not only a ladder for social mobility but also opens the doors for their modernization. Ambedkar was largely concerned about the empowerment and political struggle of the depressed classes. He believed that education was the only mean of get rid of their mental sluggishness and satisfaction with their prevalent pathetic conditions. Babasaheb envisaged that education was a powerful instrument for the change of the lives of untouchables and women. According to him any social transformation is incomplete till we wipe out gender discrimination in the society. And this is only possible only through appropriate education and gender sensitization (Uma H.R.: Nanaiah K, 2014). He believed that education would enlighten the downtrodden and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

He acclaimed that the lack of education was the foremost cause for the backwardness of underprivileged people. He recognized the importance of education in shaping the future. He put all his efforts to guarantee the educational without any discrimination to all the citizens of independent India. Dr. Ambedkar gave the slogan of Educate, Agitate and Organize. The slogan has a deep rooted meaning that can be understood as under:

Educate

As education directly influence the human civilization, it is essential to educate each and every citizen of the country. Therefore the education is indispensable for the state to realize the goal of growth and sustainable development.

Agitate

Agitate is mental uprising not physical agitation. According to Ambedkar an educated man, by understanding his thoughts and strategy can initiate agitating mentally. The agitated mind would drive educated people to form associations/organizations and eventually they would take action to fix the problems.

Organize

Educated and agitated minds will certainly organize for a common mission. All of us must get ourselves educated resulting in agitating thoughts so as to collectively organize. The agitated minds for a universal mission would help the people to unite, strive & struggle for the common goal.

Ambedkar's Struggle & Contribution for Upliftment of the Downtrodden

In India, the Hindu social system was based on caste that proclaimed a social order since ancient time. It was the main cause/source of injustice within Indian society. All human are equal by birth but a few selfish & snobbish people constructed caste system based on occupations that contributed to the evil practice of untouchability. The Hindu caste system had its origin in the period of Manusmriti. In this Hindu caste system untouchables are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and called Shudras. Today they are known as Dalits. These are the people who are poor, neglected, mistreated and downtrodden.

These people were excluded from various human rights viz. social, economic and political rights including the right to education and employment. They constituted the traditionally forced and customary undignified and mortifying labour due to their birth in the untouchable castes. These people were forced to live on the outskirts of the villages and towns in the areas towards which the wind blew and sewage flowed. Their houses were dirty, dingy, dark, and unhygienic full with poverty and squalidness.

Dr. Ambedkar devoted his whole life to fight for the annihilation of caste by proliferating a movement against the evils of the caste system. Being himself a Dalit, he made all his efforts to change the hierarchical structures of Indian society and restoration of equal rights/justice to the marginalized. He opted for peaceful and constitutional methods for sake of resolution of the social problems. In framing the constitution of independent India, he played a leading role. His programs were focused to mainstream the Untouchables into Indian society. He fought not only for equal status of Varna, but for social, economic and political equality as well as equal opportunity to all.

Babasaheb took the leadership for the emancipation of Dalits. He struggled consistently against injustice towards the untouchables in the Hindu society. He led processions for Dalit community and made a demand for separate electorates for them. He totally differed with Gandhi ji on his approach of upliftment of the Untouchables. In fact his vision was entirely different from his contemporary leaders. Actually he tried to address the problem of untouchability in a practical way while the others made emphasis on education of Dalits. They had hardly analyzed the socio-economic causes of their inferior position which was degrading continuously in the society. Being himself an untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar was familiar with the depth of their socio-economic problems and well equipped to fix them. His ideas & programs set forth concrete proposals for the removal of untouchability and the empowerment of the downtrodden. Dr. Ambedkar demanded for justice to untouchables and other weaker sections of the society via making provisions in the Indian Constitution. He advocated a society based on three fundamental principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Dr. Ambedkar expressed his views freely & fearlessly for the cause of depressed classes. For them he fought with Congress and even Mahatma Gandhi. In 1932, when Mahatma Gandhi protesting against the provision of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes in the British Prime Minister's Communal Award and proclaimed his decision to fast unto death. Almost the whole nation backed Gandhi's stand at that time. But it was Ambedkar who criticized Gandhi ji and called his fast a political stunt (Das Siddhartha, 2011). Ultimately Gandhi ji visualized his ideas seriously & agreed for reservation of seats in joint electorates for the depressed classes, which was finally materialized in the Poona Pact.

Dr. Ambedkar was a remarkable liberal crusader who realized the ideological hollowness of the Dalit Movement and provided necessary ideology to it. He created an awareness among depressed classes to have a graceful life. He launched a Satyagraha on Chandan Tank for upliftment of maginalized. As a result he succeeded to seek the right to fetch water from the tank. It was his major victory. He struggled arduously to bring about a change in the life of the downtrodden. He had all the support from the British government which believed in the policy of 'Divide and Rule'. At last Congress included eradication of untouchability in its agenda due to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi.

Dr. Ambedkar had two major conferences of untouchables during 1920, and launched a Marathi fortnightly Mooknayak (Voice of the Dumb) in January 1920. He represented the untouchables in the Round Table Conference in 1930. Due to his consistent ceaseless efforts, the harijans were granted reservation of seat in the elections. Further in 1927, he launched a Marathi paper "Bahishkrit Bharat", to communicate his vision to the public and respond to his critics. He made dalits realize to fight for their social, educational and political rights.

In 1923 Baba Saheb founded 'Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha to spread education among maginalized and to improve their economic conditions. He gave the slogan: "Educate-Agitate-Organize". He launched the social movement for the annihilation of caste system and restoration of caste-less Indian Society. Moreover for the upliftment of untouchables, he started the Samaj Samanta Sangh. He turn out to be the first law minister of Independent India and formed three political parties, viz. Independent Labor Party, the Republican Party of India and All India Scheduled Caste Federation. Ambedkar wanted the depressed class to raise their educational standard so that to make them aware of their own situation. He wanted them to raise their level of aspirations to the level of highest Hindu so that to be in a position to use political power as a means to an end. Therefore he adopted a quadrilateral strategy for empowering dalits. In his quadrilateral

strategy the very first step was to educate the Dalits, so as to make them aware of the prevailing evils the path of their development. He emphasized that dalits themselves have to come forward in educating their own people. For the purpose he established People's Education Society and started first educational Institute in Bombay. Baba Sahib emphasized self respect, fearlessness and education of the dalits to end the innumerable atrocities and untold discriminations towards the untouchables which was prevailing form centuries together. He accepted the education as the only weapon in the hand of dalits to apprehend their dream of upliftment. All through his life he worked arduously for the purpose for empowering dalits by establishing a variety of educational institutions at all levels viz. primary, secondary and higher.

Ambedkar's way of thinking was a result of his acute dissatisfaction with the anomalous treatment with the people of his own community. His mind was engrossed with the social amelioration, political enlightenment, economic well-being and spiritual awakening of the downtrodden. He had a strong belief in the equal rights for man and woman, in the dignity of an individual, in the upgradation of standards of life and certainly, in peace, harmony and security in every sphere of human life.

In the words of first Prime Minister of India Pt. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar would be remembered mostly as the symbol of revolt against all the oppressing features of Hindu society. In a way he symbolized the hopes and aspiration of the oppressed and the Untouchables."

Dr. Ambedkar asserted that the Untouchable's existing position in the Indian Society was social and had no racial origin. Due to the social origin it was liable to change. By 1935, he declared that unless and until the caste was totally annihilated, mortifying position of dalits in Indian society wouldn't improve. According to him caste embodied Brahmans an unscrupulous superiority. Therefore for social transformation of the Hindu society and and to strengthen the social life of the marginalized he led three temple Satyagraha, viz. Parvati temple, Kalaram temple and Thakurduara temple. Unfortunately all his efforts went in vein & he couldn't succeed in the movement. As a consequence of the complete failure of the temple entry movement and the Puna Pact, Ambedkar realized that while living within Hinduism, the very goal of dalit emancipation was impossible to achieve. Hinduism was beyond any type of reforms from within. Then he asked over his people to stop fighting for entering the temples to fetch equal status with other Hindus. He appealed the depressed classes to leave Hinduism and join some other religion. On the day of 13th October 1935, at the historic Yeola Conference Baba Sahib said, "I was born as a Hindu but will not die as a Hindu".

After the Yeola declaration, Baba Saheb chalked out a new strategy to fight for the cause of the downtrodden. He was deeply upset at the plight of the labourers. Under the banner of Savatantara Mazdoor Dal (ILP) he organized all the labourers in 1936. As a results of his efforts Swantatara Mazdoor Dal bagged all the fifteen seats in the of 1937 provincial councils, held in Bombay. Baba Saheb turned out to be a messiah of downtrodden. They started worshiping him like God. After that he founded the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942 to be followed by Republican Party of India.

Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his whole life for the cause eradicating untouchability. He completely identified himself with the socially segregated and isolated section of untouchables in the Indian society. He launched a life-long crusade for their liberation and emancipation. He stood for a complete reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society on the principle of equality free from castism. He advocatd equality of opportunity. He is regarded as the great protagonist of reservation of seats for scheduled castes in legislature and government jobs. But towards the end of

his life, Baba Saheb, the great architect of the constitution of Independent India, embraced Buddhism as a step towards the creation of an egalitarian and democratic society based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. When he embraced Buddhism with hundreds of thousands of Mahar's, as his followers, he advised the Scheduled Castes to stand on their own legs instead of depending on crutches. Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a symbolic protest to the oppressions of caste inequalities prevailing in Indian society.

Dr. Ambedkar had advised his people certain strategies for emancipation from oppression. He found the emancipation of dalits in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect and education. Ambedkar believed that Buddha treated dalits with respect and love, and never tried to oppress them as in Hinduism. He continued his struggle for social democracy till his last breath in India on 6th December 1956, the day he achieved Maha-parinirvan.

Conclusions

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar's contribution in shaping the modern India is remarkable. He showed the way to millions of the downtrodden to a life of self respect, dignity and responsibility. He always stressed spreading education as the only hope among dalits for their upliftment in the society. He emphasized education as a key instrument of liberation from oppression from Hindu caste-patriarchy structures and was the capable of establishing a new social order.

His interpretations about the origins of castism and untouchability are not only rational and logical but are grounded in grass-roots reality of which he himself was an integral part. India, have no other leader of the kind Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, The great Indian Crusader for Social Justice and Champion of Human Rights. Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Indian Constitution is one of the greatest contributions of Dr. Ambedkar to India. The establishment of Dr. Ambedkar Chair (Constitutional Law) in Columbia University from where he learnt his lessons of social equality, liberty and democracy under the guidance of reputed scholar Professor Dewey is a great and real tribute to messiah of downtrodden.

Even after sixty-six years after independence, Caste prejudices in India are still prevailing. The conditions of the untouchables and depressed classes in Indian society have not changed much. The pathetic condition of the oppressed classes has not shown the expected improvement. Social as well as economic inequalities still continue to persist. Ambedkar's dream of an egalitarian society based on socio-economic justice, equality and human dignity is yet to be realized. Dada Saheb had a dream of raising the educational standard of the depressed classes. He wanted them to know their own conditions, have aspirations to rise themselves to the level of highest Hindu. He wished them to be in a position to use political power as a means to an end. Without Ambedkar's intervention for bringing appropriate measures of material empowerment and emancipation of the downtrodden, they would never be able to get their rightful place in nation. It was Ambedkar's strenuous political challenge and struggle which compelled congress to realize the national significance of the problem of the scheduled castes. As a result the congress espoused certain measures which significantly contributed in the direction of augmenting and strengthening the social foundation of the country.

A statesman, scholar, crusader of downtrodden and above all a spiritual guide, Dr. Ambedkar has left an indelible impression on the Indian History. His contribution in upliftment of the downtrodden made him a messiah among the downtrodden. Undoubtedly he lives in the hearts and minds of the millions who suffer from oppression, injustice, tyranny, exploitation and slavery.

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