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GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR'S PHILOSOPHY

INCLUSION, EQUALITY AND DIGNITY

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Professor (Dr.) Ashu Pasricha

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by

Professor (Dr.) Ashu Pasricha

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DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR AS A CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THINKER

Desh Raj Sirswal

Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the names associated with the movement to reform the social order that has long been based on suppression and humiliation. He was a philosopher, scholar, and statesman who made significant contributions to nation-building. He spearheaded a number of movements to liberate the oppressed masses and ensure human rights for millions of depressed people. He left an indelible mark on the contemporary Constitution of free India by making significant contributions to its formulation. He symbolizes the struggle for social justice. We can attribute multiple roles to this outstanding individual because of his lifelong dedication to his aim of removing ills from Indian society. The social problems of Indian society also ignored this magnificent figure, especially in the intellectual area. The so-called intellectuals of India did not honestly examine his contribution to Indian intellectual legacy; rather, what they talked revealed their biases against Dalit literates and underestimated his outstanding personality. This paper will aim to examine essential life facts as well as provide a brief overview of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's literature. This is followed by a discussion of his philosophy divided into five major sections: feminism and women's empowerment, philosophy of education, thoughts about social justice and equality, philosophy of politics and economics, and philosophy of religion.

Keywords: Indian education, women's empowerment, social equality, and religious philosophy.

Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is considered one of modern India's most prominent intellectuals. He first arrived on the Indian sociopolitical scene in the early 1920s and has stayed at the forefront of all social, economic, political, and religious attempts to uplift the lowest strata of Indian society, such as untouchables, women, and other backward castes. He was a remarkable

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academic who made significant contributions as an economist, sociologist, legal luminary, educationist, journalist, lawmaker, and, most importantly, as a social reformer and human rights advocate. The complete works of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar published by the Government of Maharastra and it has taken about 25 years to complete this initiative in 21 Volumes with the name, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches" and covers 14000 pages. These 21 Volumes includes books published by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself and unpublished writings and speeches too.

While the composition of the editorial board established in 1978 was expanded or changed over time, Shri Vasant Moon, OSD, the series' chief editor, continued to do so until his untimely death in April 2002. As a result, the first through sixteen volumes bear Shri Moon's imprint, with the seventeenth book issued in 2003. This series is set to continue with four further volumes. Volume 18 (three parts, 1978 pages) has already been published. It features Dr. Ambedkar's speeches in Marathi, the language of Maharashtra. The 19th Volume will also be in Marathi, and it will contain Dr. Ambedkar's Correspondence, the last volume, 21 will show 'Dr. Ambedkar in Photographs." In the words of Trilochan Sing, "Above all, Dr. Ambedkar is a philosopher. Those who read his books cannot be failed to be impressed with steadfastness with which he pursues truth; and only those who have dispassionately read his books can frame true estimate of the greatness of the man". We will observe some important thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, based on his writings.

1. Feminism and Women Empowerment

As the First Law Minister of India, Dr. Ambedkar for the first time tried to defend the women of India specially the weaker sections in the form of Hindu Code Bill on 11th April 1947. The Bill has the provisions for several basic rights to women. It attempted to establish monogamy as the only legal system and abolish different marriage systems prevalent among the Hindus. Its main aim was to ferment the right to property and adoption of women. It provided for restitution of conjugal rights and judicial separation.

It sought to unite the Hindu Code with progressive and modern thought. This Bill invited strong opposition from the Hindu Orthodoxy in post independent India in 1948 when Hindu

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Code Bill was introduced in Parliament and debated on the floor of the House. Ambedkar tried his level best to defend the Bill by pointing out the drawbacks of Indian Society and arguing that the ideals in the Bill are based on the constitutional principle of equality, liberty and fraternity. However the Bill could not withstand the opposition of Hindu orthodoxy. Their major argument was that the Bill will demolish the entire structure and fabric of Hindu Society. Finally in 1951 PM J. L. Nehru dropped the Bill by saying that there was too much opposition. On this issue the then Law Minister resigned for the cause of the disadvantaged.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed that women should have equal position with that of men in the society. He was influenced by the views of Gautam Buddha on women. According to Buddha women are one of the seven Treasures and a thing of supreme value. Dr. Ambedkar blamed man for giving woman a degraded position in the society. Hence he fought for giving justice to women. As a member of Bombay Legislative Council, Dr. Ambedkar fought for the 'Maternity Benefit Bill' to recognize the dignity of women. In his speech which Dr. Ambedkar delivered in D.C. Women's college of Amaravati in 1942, he said that he measured the progress of the community by the degree of progress women had achieved. He asked the women to maintain hygiene, to educate themselves and their children, and to overcome inferiority complex.

2. Philosophy of Education

According to Dr. Ambedkar, education is that which make men fearless, teach unity, make understand their birth right and teach man to struggle and fight for their freedom. Education is a revolution. If education can't serve these purposes, then such education is a dead one and better it should be burnt or set to fire. According to Dr. Ambedkar that is not education which does not make capable, don't teach equality and morality, but the true education is that which safeguards the interests of the humanity and provides bread, knowledge and feelings of equality in the society. Time education really creates life in the society. In the philosophy of Baba Saheb the place of self-respect and human pride was the greatest and most important. He, to develop the qualities of justice, through education wanted equality,

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brotherhood, freedom and fearlessness. He was in favour of making education able to provide employment. This education brings stability in the society. Good behaviour upon reason and reason gets its due place due to education, experience and interview.

The whole education system, particularly at the earliest stages of primary and secondary schools, needs to be oriented to democratic ethos, to needs of social engineering through peaceful parliamentary means, to living together with fellow feeling for each other and in harmony and mutual tolerance, and to inculcating a sense of social responsibility and patriotism. In order to establish real, concrete and practical democracy, there is a need to democratic education. It means restructuring of the entire educational system in keeping with the spirit of democracy. Unless the schools develop as democratic institutions, the development of democratic minds among pupils is not possible. Tolerance, impartiality and respect for truth should be adopted first by the teachers and the parents and plasticised by them in the classrooms and at homes, if they are to be adopted by pupils as values in their lives.

3. Ideas on Social Justice and Equality

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 casteism and untouchability are not only rational and logical but are grounded in grass-roots reality of which he himself was an integral part. 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.

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After independence Dr. Ambedkar became the First Law Minister of nation. He was appointed as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee by the Assembly to write India's new constitution. The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protection for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and outlawing all forms of discrimination. He had a real visionary towards the fundamental rights of Indian citizens and upliftment of Dalits.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar left an indelible mark on Indian polity, society and economy with a broad range of scholarly work and rigorous political activism. While much is known, heard and written about his political, social and economic writings, there has been relatively less of an attempt at understanding the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical origins of his worldview. He was passionately critical of the Hindu caste system which is the basis of social, cultural, economic and political subjugation of those considered "lower castes". In his struggle against caste based discrimination, Ambedkar held that emancipation of Dalits in India was possible only through the three-pronged approach of "education, agitation and organization". His works are deeply embedded in a secular and modern understanding of human society. Moreover, they are also imbued with a strong sense of humanism and a belief in human dignity. His worldview was formed by not only a scholarly interest but a personal experience of discrimination and marginalization. The deep sense of injustice felt by him motivated Dr. Ambedkar to challenge all oppressive institutions of society. The discourse of egalitarian Indian society is part of the large mission propounded and practiced by Dr. Ambedkar in his efforts to build Indian society imbued with the values of equality and social justice. Probably Dr. Ambedkar is the first person that seriously thought about social equality and inclusive Indian society as an essential feature for the emergence of a healthy nation-state and democracy. But most of his intellectual peers focused on economic, political and spiritual equality and ignored social inequalities. Due to this even after 68 years of independence caste based discrimination is applauded in society. However, vision of Dr. Ambedkar has been amplified through

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the discourse of egalitarian society based on the trinity of principles -- equality, liberty and fraternity.

4. Philosophy of Politics and Economics

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Directive Principles of State Policy is a 'novel feature' of the Indian Constitution. They are enumerated in Part IV of the Constitution. They can be classified into three broad categories- socialistic, Gandhian and liberal- intellectual. The directive principles are meant for promoting the ideal of social and economic democracy. They seek to establish a 'welfare state' in India. However, unlike the Fundamental Right, the directives are non- justiciable in nature, that is, they are not enforceable by the courts for their violation. Yet, the Constitution itself declares that 'these principles are fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the state to apply these principles in making laws'. Hence, they impose a moral obligation on the state authorities for their application. But, the real force (sanction) behind them is political, that is, public opinion. "His ideas of Economic realism which seek both realism and welfare prompted Prof. Amartya Sen to say "Ambedkar is my father in Economics". Ambedkar clearly voices the cause of the underprivileged when he talks about equality of opportunity to all. Should not the common man be the ultimate beneficiary of what economics as a discipline aims to achieve. It is indeed paradoxical that a thinker who tried to uphold the basic premise of the subject finds no mention among economic thinkers. Our syllabus in economics refrains from mentioning him even in the areas of Indian monetary economics, public Finance and towards land reforms where he greatly contributed. He was beyond doubt a great theorists whose legacy as Ramchandra Guha points out "has been distorted to suit particular interests". It is indeed the need of the hour that we start looking at this outstanding intellectual thinker of his time as an economist, discuss his economic ideology and it's relevance in contemporary times." "Whether it was politics, or law he stands out as a political economic thinker. The aim equal opportunities to everyone, so that an equal and inclusive society is established. He should be remembered as a policy maker who successfully incorporates both social and economic phenomenon and brings it in the perception of policy making."

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5. Philosophy of Religion Dr. Ambedkar seeks Dhamma as a social order.

He differentiated Religion and Dhamma by the following lines:

- Religion, it is said, is personal and one must keep it to oneself. One must not let it play its part in public life. Contrary to this, Dhamma is social. It is fundamentally and essentially so.
- Dhamma is righteousness, which means right relations between man and man in all spheres of life.
- One man if he is alone does not need Dhamma. But when there are two men living in relation to each other they must find a place for Dhamma whether they like it or not. Neither can escape it. In other words, Society cannot do without Dhamma.

In his book The Buddha and his Dhamma, Ambedkar makes very strong assertions that Buddhism alone can solve the problem of social and natural suffering. Dr. Ambedkar has pointed out that Buddha's Dhamma was fundamentally different from that of Religion. Dhamma is righteousness, which means right relation between man and man in all spheres of life. An analysis of Ambedkar's thoughts on religion can be seen here, "The purpose of religion is to explain the world. While interpreting Buddha's Dhamma Ambedkar viewed that it is different from the Vedic or the Brahminic philosophy of Dharma. Dr. Ambedkar has explained Buddha's Dhamma as SadDhamma because it breaks down barriers between man and man; it teaches that 'worth' and not 'birth' is the measure of man; and Dhamma to be SadDhamma must promote equality between man and man. Towards the end of his life Dr. Ambedkar also defended Buddhism against the Marxism. In his work "Buddha or Karl Marx", he regarded the Marxian philosophy as far behind Buddha. Like Buddha and Marx, he also did not accept that God created the Universe. Religion is necessary for the poor. Religion is necessary for the depressed people. The poor man survives on hope. For Ambedkar, man could not live by bread alone; he had mind which needed food for thought; and religion instilled hope in man and always drove him to activity. He emphasized that mankind needed a religion of humanity, and that he discovered in

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Buddha's Dhamma."

Dr. Ambedkar sees a concern for human welfare (defined generally with reference to non-violence and social equality) as a central teaching of Buddhism and associates such welfare with rationality. For instance, Ambedkar explains his principles for distinguishing between Buddhist Dhamma and dangerous Brahmnical views, "Anything therefore which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha...The Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha." This is rightly said that "The philosophy of Babasaheb gives guideline for the fighting for the rights and development of all sections of the society. In order to have more effective implementation of his thoughts, we need to look for some more types of the interpretation of his thoughts, work and life." For this we need to emphaise on the concept of morality as it the most important branch of philosophy and we can found the same in the thoughts of Babasaheb.

Conclusion

It is possible to classify Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's beliefs, writings, and perspective as being part of the Social Humanism school of thought. He created a socio-ethical ideology and unwaveringly supported material prosperity, socioeconomic justice, human freedom and dignity, and spiritual discipline. Through his principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, he illuminated the way forward for Indian society and established democracy in India. He described democracy as "one person, one vote" and "one vote, one value," and he gave it an extraordinary function. He is revered by Indians, particularly the oppressed, as an eternal soul whose memory will always lead the country toward social justice, liberty, and equality. It might be argued that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's theory still has a lot to offer Indian society in terms of promoting equality and freedom, eliminating untouchability, and achieving social justice and true democracy.

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About the Book

Gandhi and Ambedkar are both great philosophers, academicians, jurists, scholars, journalists, social reformers, politicians, and the main architects of the Indian Constitution. Having experienced the pain and stigma of their birth identity, both Gandhi and Ambedkar grew up. Both were very optimistic and visionary, who observed the flaws of society and decided to change them.

In the contemporary scenario, our nation has been facing various kinds of problems: inequality, injustice, economic backwardness, illiteracy, unemployment, populism, corruption, gender discrimination, illusionism, etc. To eradicate all these social evils, Gandhi Ambedkar's work is to build an egalitarian society with inclusion and dignity, respect for all individuals and their rights.

The book in your hand is focused on the different aspects of the philosophies of Gandhi and Ambedkar.

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Professor (Dr.) Ashu Pasricha, Chairperson and Honorary Director Gandhi Bhawan, Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh is a multificated personality, Law Graduate (LLB) also ad has been associated with the number of national and international academic, cultural, educational, social and peace organizations/ institutions/bodies such as "European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS), Zurich, Switzerland" and various other committees.

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