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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Struggle for Social Change in India

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Bhimrao Babasaheb Ramji Ambedkar was a great son of India who devoted his life to the battle for social change in India. During the time of the Middle Ages, Indian society was suffering from several social issues, like discrimination in the caste system, untouchability, violation of human rights, poverty, illiteracy, etc. Though after the Middle age, the process of social change in India started with the Renaissance in the eighteen Century by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and in this process, Dr. Ambedkar also made his great contribution. Dr. Ambedkar was very critical of the caste system in India. He believed that the caste system should be eliminated as it promotes social inequalities and injustice. He realized the inequalities and injustices of Indian society throughout his life as he belonged to the 'Dalit' community. He declared war against the discrimination and injustice that prevailed in Indian society and continued his fighting till death. He started his struggle for social change in India during the British colonial era and ended with independent India. This paper will attempt to describe Dr. Ambedkar's quest for social change in India.

Introduction

Indian civilization is one of the old and most well-developed civilizations. As India was under foreign rule for a long period, which created many social obstacles and inequalities in Indian society. As a result, it has become indispensable to remove these social barriers for the survival of Indian society. Many social reformers took this task and struggled for an egalitarian society in India and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was one among them. Dr. Ambedkar sacrificed his life in driving social change in India, particularly in addressing the issues of caste discrimination, untouchability, and the empowerment of marginalized communities. He played different roles to bring changes in Indian society. As an educationist, he tried to spread education among all mainly among the women and deprived section of society, as a legal professional fought for the rights of the common people, as an economist he tried to solve the problems of the Indian labourers and agrarian issues, as a social reformer tried to eliminate untouchability as the most terrible social barrier, as a writer made a protest against the exploitation of the backward section, as a politician tried to unite masses, as a Minister of Law tried to initiate many legislations, as a Buddhist activist tried to implement teachings of Buddha in his social movement, as a chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution inserted many provisions in the Constitution upliftment and development of the downtrodden section of Indian society.

Society:

"Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god" (Rahman, 2014) -these words of the legendary Greek philosopher Aristotle establish the necessity of society in human life. Society is the most used word which is used in our life with a particular meaning. We often define society as an aggregation or grouping of individuals. Sometimes, society refers to people who use to live in a defined territory and share a common culture. But in sociology and anthropology the term society is used to refers not just to a group or collection of individuals but also to the complex pattern of norms of interaction that prevail among them. August Comte, an eminent sociologist defined society as a social organism based on a harmony of structure and function. Emile Durkheim viewed society as a reality in its own right. According to Talcott Parson 'society is a total complex of human relationships in so far as they grow out of the action in terms of means-end relationship intrinsic or symbolic. So, society can be traced as a process that includes a series of interactions between individuals- each individual stimulating another and responding to the stimuli from the other. No social life is possible without such an institution (Dobb, 1985).

The Process of Social Change:

So, society is one of the most important and primitive institutions of the individual and without which an individual cannot imagine her or his life. But this institution is closely tied up with the process of evolution. No society can be stagnant as it is a developing organism. So, change is an important characteristic of all societies. The process of social change may be defined as the process by which significant alteration in the functioning and structure of a particular social system takes place (Y. Singh, 2016). In general, the process of social change refers to the changes in social behaviour, social structure, or socio-cultural values in any society. The term social change generally refers to the ideas of continuity and persistence. So, society always undergoes changes slowly or rapidly, there must be some internal or external forces that facilitate the process of social change. Innovations, diffusion, cultural process, population, youth, ideas, conflicts, growths, natural environment, globalization, etc may play crucial roles in the changes in any society (Macionis, 1987). Though society is dynamic and always changes slowly or rapidly, sometimes this

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process faces challenges from many social institutions. For that reason, leaders of society or any institution of society may take the initiative to bring changes in society so that it can adjust to the need of the hour.

Dynamics nature of the Indian Society:

Indian society is one of the most primitive societies. The first civilized society in India can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization in almost 2300 B.C. The Indus Valley Civilization (Harappan Culture) was enriched by the Aryans who migrated and settled in the Indus Valley region. Thus, the Indus people established a society based on unique culture, customs, and traditions. Ancient Indian society witnessed many changes in the Vedic era, starting around 1500 B.C. During this period the most important social doctrine- Varna was propounded. The concept of varna was based on the principle of division of the society into four occupational groups or casts- the Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriya (warrior), The Vaishya (trader), and the Sudras (common man). The Varna system of Indian society created many tensions in the society. During the 5th century B.C., the Jainism of Mahaveera and Buddhism of Gautam Buddha brought many changes in Indian society. In the medieval era, Indian society witnessed several foreign invasions as they were attracted by the wealth of India. The mingling of the foreign invader's culture with Indian culture led to a drastic change in Indian society. Foreign invaders from the ancient period came to India with their language, religion, culture, etc., and contributed to the plurality and diversity of Indian society (Kuppuswamy, 1984).

In the modern era, India remained under foreign rule. During this era, the power to rule in India was under the Britishers and it lasted almost two centuries, until 1947 when India finally acquired independence. Indian society underwent several changes after the Britishers came to India. In the early 19th century many social customs or practices like child marriage, polygamy, sati, female infanticide, and a rigid caste system became more prevalent. Though these social practices were against humanity. Though Britishers brought a few important new ideas, such as liberty, equality, fraternity, and rights from the Renaissance and reformation movements of Europe (Srinivas, 2009). These new ideas attracted the intellectual section of our society and led to different reformist movements in India. These reformist or social movements were led by the national heroes of India and the most important of them were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule, Swami Vivekananda, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, etc.

B. R. Ambedkar and the Process of Social Change in India:

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is mostly known to us as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, but he was also an important social reformer, eminent jurist, historian, philosopher, political leader, famous economist, Buddhist activist, scholar, writer, and editor, too. 'One man one value' was the main mantra of Dr. Ambedkar and on the basis of this egalitarian message, he challenged the caste and class-based inequal social order of India. As he belonged to the Mahar (dalit) caste, he was treated as untouchable and faced socio-economic discrimination. In his writing "No Peon, No Water", Ambedkar described his pain as in his school days, he and his untouchable classmates were not allowed to sit inside the classroom and not allowed to touch either the water or the container of water. When they needed to drink water, usually this task was performed by the school peon. These cruel social practices forced Ambedkar to organize movements for social change in India. To change the existing social discrimination and establish the principles of social justice in India he focused on the numerous socio-economic issues created by the institution of caste, problems of untouchability, agrarian issues, religious obstacles, human rights issues, problems of Indian women, Indian labourer, and above all the political system of India. To overcome from these problems, he tried to construct a democratic political system based on the principle of 'one man one value' as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution (Mallik, 1996).

Though the task of social reformation in India was started in the late 18th century under British rule, but the British government was very cautious in undertaking massive steps for the process of social change in India. They feared that too much interference in the matters of social customs and religious beliefs of the Indians may create problems for their rule in India. They only wanted to perpetuate their rule. For that reason, they took many initiatives to induce reforms in India, but in reality, very few half-hearted initiatives were taken by them. Though many eminent social reformers tried wholeheartedly to bring changes in Indian society, but most of them did not get full success in their mission.

As belonging to the Mahar (dalit) community Ambedkar had the experience of the exploitation of the lower caste people in the Indian social structure. He started his mission in the 1920s to change the existing social order and also to establish a society based on 'social justice'. For the upliftment of the depressed class, Ambedkar argued for the creation of a separate electorate and reservation for untouchables and minority religious communities before the Southborough Committee, which was entitled to prepare the 'Government of India Act 1919' (Singh, 2011).

Being a legal professional, he worked for the upliftment of the untouchables. In different cases in the Bombay High Court, he gave emphasis on the education of the untouchables. To promote education among the untouchables and their socio-economic improvements he for the first time organized an attempt to establish a central institution named 'Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha'. This institution tried to remove the social obstacles of the depressed class by placing their grievances before the government. To support the rights of the depressed class Ambedkar started publishing five periodicals- Mooknayak, Bahishkrit Bharat, Samta, Janata, Prabuddh Bharat, etc (Secretariat, 1991).

In 1927 Ambedkar launched a massive protest against untouchability. He started with public movements, marches, and satyagraha to open up the resources of public drinking water, open up Hindu temples, etc. Ambedkar was very critical of the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu) as it laid the foundation for caste discrimination and untouchability in India. To launch a protest against caste discrimination Ambedkar and thousands of his followers burned copies of Manusmriti and started to

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celebrate 25th December as 'Manusmriti Dahan Din'. For the rights of untouchables to enter the Hindu temples he launched the 'Kalaram Temple Movement' in the 1930s. Under his leadership, about 15 thousand of his followers assembled at Kalaram Temple to see the god for the first time.

Dr. Ambedkar also represented the depressed classes in the Round Table Conference, where he criticized not merely the caste system but also the systematic inequality that prevailed in Indian society and upheld the idea of social justice for all. He placed the demand before the Conference about the special representation of the depressed classes and tribals in Legislatures and public services, so that they can strengthen their position. He was very much aware of the necessity and social potential of these protective measures and believed that these measures could bring changes in Indian society and establish social justice even after the independence of the country. On the basis of his demand, the British colonial government awarded a separate electorate for depressed classes and other minorities in the Communal Award of 1932 (Gehlot, 1993).

Dr. Ambedkar was very much aware of the agrarian problems of India and believed that through land reforms these problems can be solved. He upheld the idea of 'State Socialism' in his various writings, which led to a society based on "collective farming", without the existence of landlords, tenants, and land labourers.

As the Minister of Labour in the Viceroy's Executive Council (1942-1947), Dr. Ambedkar focused on the problems of the Indian labourers and propounded a 'Labour Charter', which advocated for holiday rights, maternity benefits, health and sanitation benefit, social security, and labour representation in the matter of dispute resolution with the employer. The 'Labour Charter' of Ambedkar worked as a guideline for labour welfare in independent India.

Being one of the modern thinkers of India, Ambedkar attached great importance on education, as an important tool to establish an egalitarian society in India. He believed that education only can eliminate the root of social inequalities and facilitate social change in India. After attaining education, Ambedkar first became an educationist and inspired millions of people through his speeches and writings. Ambedkar defined true education as 'a kind of education which enables a student to make difference between thought and reality'. He believed that education in a society increases social interaction among people. He also thought that education opens the way for social mobility in society and acts as a catalyst for social change. To him, education can ensure the liberty of marginalized sections in India. In the process of education, Ambedkar emphasized the field of science and technology more than others. His ideas on education opened a new dimension for social development and Dalit empowerment in India. To spread education among the masses Ambedkar established 'The Peoples Education Society' in 1945 in Bombay. The main objective of this society was to spread education among the masses mainly the poor, needy, and Dalits, and encourage their education by proving scholarships and fellowships. In his later life, he included Buddhist teachings and thoughts in his educational perspectives (Agarwal, 1991).

Dr. Ambedkar was very much a supporter of women's rights and he raised his voice for women's rights and equality for women with men. For the progress of women, he facilitated different movements and legislations as well. He treated the 'Devadasi' system as a social evil and called upon to abolish it. He believed that women's right to education and property could establish social justice in India. To support the empowerment of women, Ambedkar in 1927 in a gathering of almost three thousand women said that "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved". For the empowerment of women, he proposed the 'Hindu Code Bill' in parliament in 1951. He tried his heart and soul to pass the bill and evoked all the members to support the bill. But unfortunately, the bill did not get passed in the parliament. But his initiative was unprecedented at that time (Mallik, 1996).

Dr. Ambedkar was very lucky as he got the opportunity to work as an architect of the Indian Constitution. He had played a very crucial role in the Constituent Assembly of India, he tried to set such a mechanism that will help in the upliftment of lower-class people. As the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, he inserted many catalysts for the dynamics of Indian society. He believed that after the destruction of the caste system, the inequalities, humiliations, and untouchability of Indian society could be removed. For that purpose, provisions related to the abolition of untouchability were placed in the Chapter of fundamental rights. Under the right to equality of the Indian Constitution, Article 14 promotes 'equality before and equal protection of the laws', Article 15 upheld 'discrimination, inter alia, on the ground of caste has been prohibited', Article 16 describes 'discrimination, inter alia, on the ground of caste in public employment has been prohibited', Article 17 read as "untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of Untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law". Article 35 also reads with Article 17 and empowers the Parliament to make laws prescribing punishment for practicing untouchability. Further, 'special facilities for promotion of education of the Scheduled Caste have been provided' by Art. 46, and 'reservation of seats in Parliament, State Legislature and in public appointments for them have been secured' by Art. 330, 332, and 335 (Agarwal, 1991). The inclusion of these provisions in the Indian Constitution proves that the Constituent Assembly put great importance on the eradication of such evil practices. By this way, they tried to secure social justice and dignity for all, which were denied to a vast section of Indian society for a long time. And this was possible largely due to the continuous struggle of Dr. Ambedkar for the upliftment of the downtrodden and underprivileged section of society. The contribution of Dr. Ambedkar as the architect of the Indian Constitution and the champion of Dalit rights, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Constituent Assembly said: "Sitting in the Chair and watching the proceedings from day to day, I have realized as nobody else could have, with what zeal and devotion the member of the Drafting Committee and especially its Chairman, Dr. Ambedkar, in spite of his indifferent health, have

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worked. We could never make a decision which was or could be ever so right as when we put him on the Drafting Committee and made him its Chairman. He has not only justified his selection but has added lustre to the work which he has done…." (CAD, November 26, 1949)

In the last phase of his life, Ambedkar adopted Buddhism which insisted upon three main principles- 'Prajna', 'Samata', and 'Karuna'. To Ambedkar, Buddhism was not just a religion but a social movement to lead an egalitarian society. Yet he selected the path of Buddhism to transform the Dalit community. Though the Dalit Buddhist movement of Ambedkar rejected the traditional mainstream practices and precepts of Buddhism and reconstructed the religion in terms of social movement and also class struggle. In 1955 he founded 'the Buddhist Society of India' to flourish a just society in India. The main mission of this society was 'to revive the Social and Moral Teachings of Buddha and make India a casteless society' (Bardia, 2009).

Conclusion:

The contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar from an Indian socio-political perspective is marvellous. He greatly contributed to the socio-political development of the country. He immolated his life for the downtrodden people of India. Throughout his life, he tried to transform the unequal and unjust social order of India into a just society. Dr. Ambedkar through his initiatives, speeches, and writings struggled for social justice on the bases of the upliftment of downtrodden people. To cut the roots of all social inequalities in Indian society he used education as a weapon. He was successful to a large extent to accomplish his dream, to build a society that promotes justice for every section of the people.

As a member of the Constituent Assembly and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar also played special innings in the rebuilding of the new nation. Almost 200 years long British colonial rule in India destroyed, divided, and dismantled the Indian society and a large section of the Indian people was deprived of social justice. As a result, it has become essential to ensure justice for all sections of Indian society under the new republic. Dr. Ambedkar was one of the important leaders in the Constituent Assembly who struggled for social justice. Under his endeavor, many provisions for human rights, women's rights, special rights for downtrodden people, and social justice were included in the Constitution.

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