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AMBEDKAR: GIVING THE DALITS A VOICE

Anusha Malhotra

Department of Political Science (G.E.), Lady Shri Ram College For Women

The researcher, in part 1 of this paper aims to provide an understanding of why Dr BR Ambedkar decided to publish the multiple newspapers he founded, i.e. ‘Mooknayak’, ‘Bahishkrit Bharat’, and ‘Janata’, dedicated exclusively to representation of Dalit issues.

The 2nd part deals with an overview of the representation of Dalits in Indian media prior to these publications, part 3 establishes a proper understanding of the newspapers’ functioning, and finally, the last part explains the role Dr Ambedkar, the Journalist played in providing the Dalits a platform in an overtly hostile environment, helping emancipate them.

PART 1 – WHY AMBEDKAR BEGAN PUBLISHING HIS OWN PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Ambedkar was correct in noticing that current journals like 'Deena Mitra,' 'Lagruki,' 'Rayaf,' 'Maratha,' 'Induprakash,' and 'Subhodh-Patrika' discussed the issues of the time. However, the label "downtrodden civilization" (Bahiskrut) is a misnomer.

'Non-brahmin' press ('Bramhanetar'), which included numerous non-brahmins. Never could castes and creeds be reconciled. In addition, these, according to Dr. Ambedkar, publications did not provide the necessary information. There is enough room for a comprehensive exploration of these problems. This was a unique opportunity. Dr. Ambedkar was inspired to start his own business because of this clear reality. "Swantra Patra," a free and courageous newspaper. He was certain that an independent publication was necessary in challenging conditions discussing intertwined and complex issues Dr. BR Ambedkar provided a platform for social change through his works. It's worth remembering that Gandhi started the 'Harijan' movement in 1947.

In order to advance the cause of the untouchables, it was founded in 1933. The Indian media, which lauds Gandhi's attempts to establish a newspaper for the untouchables, ignores Ambedkar's efforts, which include the publication of 3 publications for his people. Ambedkar needed a media, a mouthpiece, because the pro-Congress media refused to talk about the oppressed, Ambedkar's battles, or his beliefs. Ambedkar was convinced that newspapers had the power to alter the lives of millions of downtrodden people.

All through his life, Ambedkar compiled information, analyzed them and produced writings, which awakened the Dalits. It was unlike anybody else had ever done. He was like a one-man army, armed with knowledge, who dealt a crushing blow to the brahmanical order and converted India from a feudal to a modern civilization. He felt compelled to start a newspaper while teaching political economy at Sydenham College in Bombay (11 November 1918 to 11 March 1920). The lack of capital was a severe impediment, so Dattoba Pawar had Shahu Maharaj introduced to him.

Dattoba Pawar belonged to the Chambhar tribe (known in Uttar Pradesh as Chamar and Jatav). He was a coworker of Shahuji Maharaj in the 1917 effort to elevate the oppressed society. This was a watershed year in the history of the social revolution. The year was 1917, and it was the year of the Russian Revolution, which ended up triggering a worldwide debate. Ambedkar also returned from Columbia University, where he had acquired his PhD for his written thesis "National Dividend of India: A Historic and Analytical Study."

Shahuji Maharaj was also intrigued by the press. Pawar aided in the planning of Ambedkar's 1919 visit to Shahuji Maharaj. During this meeting, Shahuji swiftly agreed to financially support Ambedkar's newspaper. Ambedkar also founded the 'Mooknayak' movement.

With the help of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Ambedkar created 'Mooknayak,' a fortnightly journal, on January 31st, 1920. Despite the fact that Ambedkar was not the official editor, he was the driving force behind it, and it served as his voice.

The ad for 'Mooknayak' was turned down by the 'Kesari' newspaper. The 'Kesari' refused to even reveal its publishing despite being paid to do so as a paid advertisement, indicating how violent and unfriendly the times were. Tilak was still alive when it all transpired! 1954 (Keer) It was banned not only to touch oppressed people, but also to advertise in their newspapers (in their magazine).

Ambedkar's newspapers were given titles that made it clear what they were about. 'Mooknayak' ('The Leader of the Dumb'), 'Janata' ('The People'), and 'Bahishkrit Bharat' ('Excluded

India') were all important to the oppressed people. Oppressed people marched to Mahad's Chowdar tank in March 1927, headed by Ambedkar, and asserted their right to water by drinking from the tank. As a result, defenceless civilians were attacked by Caste Hindu gangs. That was said at the first large-scale Depressed Classes symposium, which was open to the public. This became a hot topic of conversation in India. Maharashtra's newspapers were split into two groupsOthers cried crocodile tears, stating that what happened in the city after the meeting was not good, while others congratulated the Untouchable Hindus for standing up for their rights (Keer,1954). At this point, Ambedkar was under a barrage of criticism. As a result, he was eager to test out a different mouthpiece.

On April 3, 1927, in Bombay, Ambedkar began publishing his Marathi newspaper, 'Bahishkrit Bharat.' He explained the purpose of the journal by saying that he became a lawyer because he believed that one's attempt to run a newspaper for the benefit of the people should always be backed up by a separate profession for one's personal livelihood (Keer, 1954). Around the same time, B.R. Ambedkar began spreading a different vision of Dalithood through his third newspaper ‘Janata’, emphasising the Dalit's distinction from the rest of the 'country.' Rather than submerging the Dalit struggle in Gandhi's aim of creating a unified, homogeneous nation-space, Ambedkar advocated a separate Dalit-space (Narayanan, 2005). Bhaskarrao Kadrekar was the editor of the weekly ‘Janata’.

According to Ratnamala (2012), the reception Ambedkar received from colonial and post-colonial national media is reminiscent of the attention given to Booker T. Washington, a well-known voice for African Americans, in the White press.

This was the background against which Ambedkar made the shift to being a *'patrakar'* and started publishing his multiple publications.

PART 2 – DALITS IN MEDIA PRIOR TO THE AMBEDKAR ADVENT

The media had a critical part in forming a nation and mobilising the masses to support the struggle of independence. Apart from the original struggle for independence in 1857, British India witnessed a slew of Adivasi revolts and oppressed-class demonstrations throughout the nineteenth century. Indian journalists, with the exception of a few murmurings, did not sympathise with the struggling people, much alone publicly voice concerns about political and social exploitation. This apathy was caused by the bourgeois type press's lack of interest. They were the result of the new government's efforts. The commercialization of the press drew big businesspeople like Birla, Goenka, and Dalmia.

Despite the fact that they were labelled as nationalists, the reality was quite different. They were pro-British, pro-Congress, pro-Hindu, pro-Muslim, pro-Nizam, and pro-kings/nawabs, among other groups. Furthermore, they were published in several languages and belonged to various provinces.

In the debut edition of 'Mooknayak', Ambedkar wrote in the editorial, explaining the logic for its publishing:

"If we take even a cursory look at the publications produced in the Bombay Presidency, we will notice that many of them are exclusively concerned with defending the interests of a few [upper] castes. And they couldn't give a damn about the interests of other castes. But that's not all. They occasionally work against the interests of other castes." Round Table India (Round Table India, 2015).

In many of his publications, Ambedkar criticised Indian newspapers for their hostile attitude toward oppressed people's problems. He also pointed out that oppressed people were underrepresented in Indian periodicals, effectively silencing his and his people's voices. His criticism may be deduced from the following words: “It was depressing that we don’t have enough resources with us. We don’t have money; don’t have newspapers; Through out India, each day our people are suffering under authoritarian with no consideration and discrimination; those are not covered in the newspapers. By a planned conspiracy the newspapers are involved full-fledged in silencing our views on socio political problems.” Ambedkar added: “The Untouchables have no Press. The Congress Press is closed to them and is determined not to give them the slightest publicity. They cannot have their own Press and for obvious reasons. No paper can survive without advertisement revenue. Advertisement revenue can come only from business and in India all business, both high and small, is attached to the Congress and will not favour any non-Congress organisation. The staff of the Associated Press in India, which is the main news distributing agency in India, is entirely drawn from the Madras Brahmins—indeed the whole of the Press in India is in their hands—and they, for well-known reasons, are entirely pro-Congress and will not allow any news hostile to the Congress to get publicity. These are reasons beyond the control of the Untouchables.”

Ambedkar was plainly irritated and convinced by the media's biassed and subjective viewpoints, as well as their inclination to ignore facts, to the point where he felt compelled to express himself in black and white. Four facts are highlighted by Dr. Ambedkar's remark. Even in 1951, Indian publications were known for their prejudiced and opinionated viewpoints. They manipulated facts to improve the image of individuals they liked while painting those they didn't like in a negative light; and four, even someone of Dr. Ambedkar's stature might be a victim of reckless and driven journalism.

PART 3: THE NEWSPAPERS' FUNCTIONING

Ambedkar contributed more than 40 items to the first issues of Mooknayak, including a dozen editorials. Pandurang Bhatkar person who was was the first official editor. In the month of April 1923, 'Mooknayak' had to unfortunately stop it's publication due to a financial crisis and a feud between Dr Br Ambedkar and the Editor Gyandeo Gholap, who was the man whi had taken over as editor from Bhatkar. Four years later, on the date of 3 April 1927, Dr Ambedkar released his second very own Marathi fortnightly, 'Bahishkrit Bharat,' which remained in publication until 1929. In the year of 1928, Ambedkar founded the 'Samta' periodical. It was later renamed 'Janata,' then 'Prabdha Bharat,' before being renamed once more in 1954. By that time, it had evolved into being a weekly. As a result of all of this, Ambedkar worked as a journalist for 36 years, with breaks in between.

His magazines were outspoken in their opposition to caste prejudice, publishing vehement pieces on Hindu religion and

scriptures, as well as several social reform movements around the country (Pol, 2018). Out of all of Ambedkar's publications, 'Janata' was his most successful and longest-running bimonthly newspaper. The slogan "Tell the slave he is a slave and he will revolt" appeared frequently in 'Janata,' conveying the publication's radical and assertive tone. Despite the fact that it was written in Marathi, the newspaper was jam-packed with information. It used to discuss Dalit issues as well as world events like as the French Revolution, World War II, US politics, and Jerusalem's problems.

'Samta' (Equality), 'Janata' (People), and 'Prabuddha Bharat' (Enlightened India) were the titles of Ambedkar's periodicals, which revealed his politics and aspirations. In four ways, his work in these journals called into question the underlying premise of upper-caste journalism:

1. They called attention to Hinduism's dominance in journalism, writing, and literature.

2. They sent a strong message to Hindu castes that newspapers might be professionally owned, edited, and published by those who had hitherto been excluded from the media.

3. They implanted in the Untouchables a new sense of awakening and conscientization, resulting in increased mobilisation, resistance, and assertion.

4. Between ground combat and intellectual struggles, a balance and coordination developed.

Dr. Ambedkar decided to publish 'Mooknayak' in order to enlighten the world about the atrocities perpetrated against the Untouchables, as well as the means by which they could be

freed. It's worth noting that he didn't let 'Mooknayak' or any of his other four publications become conduits for casteist ideas. He believed that everything that affected one caste also harmed society as a whole. He compared society to a boatload of travellers. "If any one caste remains degraded, it will have an adverse influence on other castes, too," he warned the casteist journals. Society is like to a boat. Similarly, a caste that causes harm to other castes would definitely suffer, either directly or indirectly. As a result, newspapers pursuing their own self-interests should not follow in the footsteps of a fool who deceives others while protecting his own interests" (ibid p 34). Dr. Ambedkar declared that he would not "follow the example of a fool who deceives others while maintaining his own interests," and that his publication was not meant to harm any caste or community, but rather to build a society in which no one harms others while safeguarding their own interests.

On 31 January 1920, the first issue of 'Mooknayak' was published, and on 4 February 1956, the first issue of 'Prabdha Bharat' was launched. On April 3, 1927, he released 'Bahishkrit Bharat' (India of the Outcastes), which was followed by 'Samata' on June 29, 1928, and Janata on November 25, 1930. From Mooknayak to Prabuddha Bharat, it was a voyage of ideas and effort. In 'Prabuddha Bharat,' the Mooknayak (hero of the voiceless) saw their liberation (Enlightened or awakened India). Dr. Ambedkar's journalism career began with the publication of 'Mooknayak,' in which he became the voice of the voiceless, and culminated with the publication of 'Prabdha Bharat,' in which he envisioned an enlightened India.'

PART 4: DR. AMBEDKAR’S JOURNALISTIC EFFORTS IN EMANCIPATING THE DALITS

All of the publications were written in Marathi, Ambedkar's native tongue, and he wrote about societal concerns such as caste structures and their consequences on society, as well as Dalits.

Gail Omvedt, a well-known academic who has researched Ambedkar extensively, claims that he wished to construct a new India. "Dr. Ambedkar lived and worked in the early part of the twentieth century," she adds. That was the time when India's liberation struggle was at its pinnacle. Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, fought for a different sort of liberty. It was a fight for the most oppressed sections of Indian society to be free. His war for independence was larger and more in-depth than the struggle for independence waged against colonial rule. He desired to establish a new nation." Dr. Ambedkar strove for the freedom of outcasts and the establishment of a new society, as evidenced by his journalistic articles and the publications he founded.

Dr. Ambedkar primarily used the press as a vehicle for social change. The papers' goals and objectives were very apparent. Ambedkar's journalism was crucial in his battle for oppressed people's rights. Mooknayak, on the other hand, lasted only a few years following Shahuji Maharaj's death in 1922. Ambedkar went on to publish three more newspapers in his later years: 'Bahishkrut Bharat' (Ostracized India) in 1927, 'Janata' (The People) in 1930, and 'Prabdha Bharat' (Enlightened India) in 1956. In response to increased political consciousness among the masses, particularly among the lower castes, Ambedkar altered the names of his newspapers. "Bahishkrut Bharat" was written after Ambedkar led a post-Mahad agitation in Mahad (Raigad district), Maharashtra, to allow untouchables to drink from a public tank. He used the newsletter to press for Dalit access to temples and public water sources. To conjunction with

his drive to convert his supporters to Buddhism, his journal "Janata" (1927) was renamed "Prabudha Bharat" (1956). The sentence "Founded by Dr. Ambedkar" appeared under the masthead on every issue.

Dr. Ambedkar marked the beginning of a new era in Marathi literature. His works were widely read throughout Vidarbha and the Kokan region. Dr. Ambedkar's Marathi Press (1920-1956) influenced a generation of Dalit writers. End of 1960s Marathi literature began a new period of biographies-Atma Kathans, novels, short tales, and poetry to reveal the society's complaints.

Ambedkar's journalism also played a role in shaping the debate over the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar's speeches at the Constituent Assembly reflect the imprint of his many years of journalistic writing. Ambedkar's movements, as detailed in his writings, generated a "vocabulary of rights," which he promoted in the Assembly, according to Gautam Bhatia. Ambedkar delivered his addresses in English at the Constituent Assembly, but he used his news weeklies to educate and mobilise the populace in Marathi. In this context, Prabodhan A. Pol offers an intriguing perspective "One of the first authors on Ambedkar, Ratnakar Ganveer, noted that Ambedkar originally struggled to express himself in Marathi because of his English education. He would write the editorials in English and then translate them into Marathi to cope with the scenario ".

Dr. Ambedkar found time to write for his publications despite his hectic political schedule and many obligations as a member of the Viceroy's Council or Chairman of the Indian Constitution Drafting Committee. He would even write articles while on tour outside of India for Round Table Conferences and other events.

The most crucial element to him was the quality of the writing. He used to write editorials late at night, but the quality of his work was always excellent. On Dr. Ambedkar's journalistic side, a lot of writing and study has been done.

He used the press as a vehicle for social change throughout his life. His writings are not intended to be misinterpreted in any way. Dr. Ambedkar's intentions were quite clear, and his views were also very clear in his journals. In fact, Dr. Ambedkar was well-known for exposing the shortcomings in Hindu rites and tradition. These were deleterious to the weaker parts of society in terms of socioeconomic development and religious identity. He conducted a thorough investigation into the issue and came to the conclusion that the downtrodden Indian may be freed from Hindu society's social enslavement, which was supported by religious and feudal oppressors.

Dr. Ambedkar was fully aware of the importance of the press as a route for the oppressed to have a complete grasp of society issues and to fight for the prevalence of equality and the potential of self-determination. It's worth emphasising that caste Hindu propaganda has the potential to skew the poor's awareness of the genuine value of their social legacy.

Two Ph.D.s have been given so far on the topic of "Dr. Ambedkar and Journalism." Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane of Aurangabad University and Dr. Shoraj Singh Bechain of JNU, New Delhi both received one in the late 1960s. Dr. Bechain's research topic was "The Effect of Dr. Ambedkar's Journalism on Dalit Literature." Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane and Sukhram Hiwrale have both authored books about Dr. Gangadhar

Pantawane and Sukhram Hiwrale, including "Patrakar Ambedkar" by Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane and "Lokpatrakar Ambedkar" by Sukhram Hiwrale. Dr. Ambedkar's Bahishkrit Bharat editorials, as well as the small articles, were published in Marathi by Ratnakar Ganvir ("sputh lekh" in Marathi).

Dalit journalism and literature has flourished in recent years. Dr. Ambedkar's writings were the foundation for everything. He is, without a doubt, the single most motivating influence in the state's rapidly developing Dalit journalism.

CONCLUSION

Without a question, Dr. Ambedkar used the press as an instrument for social change throughout his life. His writings were intended to impart social and religious knowledge to the oppressed, who had historically been placed at the bottom of Hindu society's social ladder. Dr. Ambedkar's primary goal was to bring attention to the slave mentality, as well as social inequity, in the primitive form of society, and to promote social awakening among the oppressed. His objective was to educate people for the purpose of social uplift and leading a self-respecting life in an orthodox community.

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