CONSTITUTION AND AMBEDKAR ARE CLOSELY LINKED AND INSEPARABLE REALITIES

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Like Independence Day and Republic Day that have historical and national significance, Constitution Day should also be given equal importance and be commemorated by all the Indians with pride and valor. Constitution Day usually is celebrated on the 26th of November every year as it was adopted and thus India became a Constitutional democracy. A great day for all the Indians to celebrate in a country wherein democracy is run on the preamble and articles enshrined in the Constitution. Further, on the 26th November 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India which came into effect on the 26th January, 1950.

For all Indians Constitution should be the soul. Functioning of the institutions of governance such as judiciary, executive and legislature and other integrities looms from the Constitution. From fundamental rights to democracy to electoral franchise to citizenship to what note are candidly written in detail in the Constitution. Whenever we invoke the Indian Constitution we should without forgetting talk about the main architect who contributed immensely and profoundly to India's Constitution was none other than Dr. Ambedkar. As citizens of India all of us should know about our Constitution because ours is a constitutional democracy and for the democracy to work and function Constitution plays the vital and crucial role.

News

Constitution Day: Do We Truly Know the 'Real' Ambedkar?



In a country of millions of seemingly progressive seculars and socialists, only a handful of people truly know Dr Ambedkar and appreciate him for who he was. Most express their 'relationship' with Babasaheb only on festive occasions via excruciatingly disharmonious loudspeakers and parades. An even more disturbing breed is that of 'followers' who deliberately misuse his principles of social justice for making political and financial profits.

While we tend to revere the activist and the politician/policy-maker in Ambedkar, we conveniently forget the academic in him, the one whose work was central, if not causal, to the socio-economic upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs and STs) since the dawn of this republic. In the work presented by Ambedkar at Columbia University in 1916, he demonstrated that the then caste stratification in India exerted an influence on society beyond the cultural realm.

Also Read: Why Did BR Ambedkar Convert From Hinduism to Buddhism?

Why Caste Continues to be a Socioeconomic Barrier

Probably his greatest genius was identifying caste as an economic institution amenable to the social reforms, which could be conducted through political efforts. Expounding actively on this led to the provision of reservation as a constitutional provision, not a right, to the most discriminated factions of society.

The exercise of reservation in the form of seats in government educational institutions and public offices, is based on the broader rationale known as 'affirmative action'. To put it simplistically, if we are in a race, the runner on the outermost track is at a disadvantage than the runner on the innermost track. Hence, to ensure a fair race, the starting points are kept different for these runners.

The current state of affairs is however terribly disappointing in the sense that reservation has not achieved its due purpose yet.

Caste exists as a socioeconomic barrier, even in the most progressive parts of society. Caste identities are stronger than ever and discrimination has only grown to become more complex, cruel, and deceptive. Most importantly and interestingly, while we of overcoming the economic and educational plight of the historically disadvantaged, and sometimes even to an extent to reprimand the creamy-level abusers of concession among them, we've still largely kept the endogamous function of caste intact.

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The Ugly Politicisation of Caste

The political leadership in our country has failed to create pragmatic adaptations of the socioeconomic equaliser, like reservation, that would facilitate the promotion of equality of opportunities, without damaging the quality and merit of our institutions and offices.

The popular SEBC (Socially and Economically Backward Classes) reservation was never an original Ambedkarian product but a derivative of his principles applied almost after three decades.

This was a major adaptation after the reservation of the SCs/STs, which was probably well-intended, but implemented in an undeserving fashion.
I would not be bold enough to argue that the inspiration for the demand for reservations in the case of present groups comes from the advent and infallibility of the SEBC reservation. As an academic, Ambedkar keenly reviewed the macroscopic structure of society and proposed a few microscopic instruments of interventions to make a difference. The politicisation of caste is arguably the ugliest element of contemporary Indian society. Caste as a political instrument is intriguingly seductive, contrasted against the fact that the problem of endogamy-propagating caste identities continues to pervade. While all of us, including me, are an accomplice to the murder of the Ambedkarian dream of a definable extent, certain groups can be identified as the pivotal perpetrators. In the limited and nonexhaustive effort, I plan to point to three classes of the perpetrators.

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Why No Furtherance of Ambedkar's Study of Caste?
The first class is that of those whom I don't intend to blame but rather hold accountable. This is the class of scholars and academicians. While my exposure to the literature precludes me from being highly definitive about my critique, I still think it largely holds true. The ivory tower-residing sedentary bodies with proactive minds have done little, at least in the past two decades, to further Ambedkar's work. Research papers, general articles, books, lectures, discussions and all other forms of communication by the "learned" have mostly been used to either discuss Ambedkar's contribution or celebrate him as the hero of the fallen.

These are factually correct and morally justified causes, but the job of the scholar by definition, is neither of those two acts.
It is to inquire, reflect, and further the work of the giants on whose shoulders they sit. I have not come across any original research on a model of the caste system, after that of Ambedkar.

There needs to be more aggressive research for understanding the psychosocial underpinnings of the caste identities. I believe that criticising Ambedkar's ideas at this point lies beyond the rational realm of Indian scholars due to their own perversion of the meaning of caste discrimination, and those of others.

No Empirical, Quantitative Nation-Wide Assessment of 'Reservation'
We still lack, to my knowledge, an empirical longitudinal quantitative nation-wide assessment exploring the mechanistic workings of reservation as a policy. Though I must confess here that the literature on impact assessment of reservation in terms of educational and labour market growth has been active research. The contemporary unscholarly approach pervasive in the public discussion of caste and reservation is diametrically opposed to the one exploited by Ambedkar for establishing the need for reservation not only for electoral representation but more importantly for educational institutions and public offices.

He used a considerable amount of theoretical thought and relevant multidisciplinary analysis to put forward his ideas.
Ranging from then-popular methods of economic analysis to constructing a historical understanding of the Hindu society in a deeper context of socio-political dimensions, were subsumed by him for making an evidence-based and apolitical case.

Apart from the lack of good evidence, arguably a more pertinent issue is that of communication, of at least the available evidence. It gives me terrible shame to point out that that the communication networks of scholars and academicians are claustrophobic in themselves and utterly detached from the society. Hence, this cadre deserves the first tear of the natural scholar in Ambedkar.

Failure of Activism
The second class of perpetrators who have synthesised a cloud of disinformation around Ambedkar's work is the one that I consider unforgivable. It is that of activists. This is a difficult class that has evaded criticism for even the most asinine of their arguments and inimical of their deeds under the garb of 'righteous' intentions.

I should make it clear though, that the kind of activism I am referring to is the one that creates headlines, runs the prime-time debates, orchestrates forms of aggression that never intend to — yet always manage to end in violence — of the physical or psychological sort. The desire of an ideal society should be to render such an activist perpetually jobless. Activists, by the very virtue of their jobs, are created in and as a consequence of disharmony or injustice.

Such an environment thus naturally justifies their anguish in the means and the ends of their activism. However, a large portion of activism today is not fueled by genuine anguish. It is a grave failure of activism that their methods are nothing more than the ghosts of the past.

The second example is more closely related to the issue referred to above. The notion of reservation as the proxy of affirmative action for the upliftment of the historically underprivileged was necessary and genius at the time of the nation's birth.

However, to be unable to explore any new avenues of affirmative action is rather sad for our progress.
'Abusing' the Idea of Affirmative Action
This second example also points to the problems arising due to the absence of scholar-activists or scholar-leaders, that Ambedkar truly was. The problem of the unoriginality of activists is not just a theoretical concern though. In fact, it is exactly the unoriginality in activism that paves the way for the abuse and exploitation of the principles of social welfare and justice. Such an example was recently seen in Maharashtra. Hundreds and thousands of people rallied asking for reservation quota that exceeds that which is currently being assigned to the Scheduled Castes, for a group that has never been marginalised because of its caste identity. As is visible, both the unoriginal principles were exercised to abuse the idea of affirmative action.

A positive response was elicited from the government because even the political players are accustomed to responding to such acts of unoriginality, and also because of their intentions.
The third class (pun intended) of perpetrators, is that of the politicians. Like others but more glaringly, policy-making in the domain of social welfare and justice — particularly that associated with caste identities — has become a myth. All that remains is just the exploitative politics of caste. Pointing to the issues of degradation of morals in the name of vote-bank appeasement, lack of integrity with respect to adhering to political promises, etc. would be too trite.

Why Ambedkar Would've Been in Tears Today

However, two broad attributes of contemporary politicians that are deplorable in themselves while bearing life-long consequences for the people of India, need to be underscored. First, abuse of reservation as a tool for myopic political gain while piggybacking on the very notion of social justice for their own interests, is a shameless fashion of the times. Secondly, a complete disregard for the significance of evidence and expertise in the subject matters has somehow become not only justified but also exhibitive. However, if it is to be believed that our representatives are a reflection of our society, then the locus of the problem is brought back to us. In the current time, it is rightfully compelling for us to do a better job of understanding Ambedkar. Politicians should be accused for the third tear of policymaker Ambedkar. Seeing that the pieces that he embodied as a person now lie in disconnect in India's contemporary social consciousness, must definitely make Ambedkar cry.

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My take:

It is impossible to visualize and talk about or to go through our Constitution without referring to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. BR Ambedkar a versatile and composite persona, who did manage to bring in diverse disciplines and subjects and the ways with which he integrated shows the knowledge and mastery over wide-ranging areas he had and mastered. As a visionary, he foresaw what would the best and what type of system India should have and how is to be run and therefore wherever possible he weaved in checks and balances in the Constitution. His brilliance can be seen as we read the Constitution that solidly reflects the way he argues analyses and evaluates on diverse aspects throughout the Constitution. The framework within which he articulated each and everything in detail with precision shows his brilliance of par excellence.

The Preamble of our Constitution starts with "We the People …. And then he unfolds what type of values we the people of India should uphold—secular principles that falls within the framework of secularism. Dr. Ambedkar in his wisdom thought that in a constitutional democracy where peoples' representatives gets elected in systematic right from the state assemblies to the levels of highest levels where representatives of both the houses (parliament—Lok Sabha and Raj Sabha) deliberates on issues of national importance—evolve policies, enact or abolish laws in a democratic manner. Everything should adhere to the constitutional norms and if there are any aberrations or contestation as the check judiciary takes over and thus interprets as enshrined in the Constitution. Nothing should be dealt ouside the framework of the Constitution. Therefore India's Constitution and BR Ambedkar are intrinsically webbed with each other.