



DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WITH REFERENCE TO UNTOUCHABLES

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Introduction

The first United Nations Development Program Human Development Report published in 1990 stated that: The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. It also defined human development as “a process of enlarging people’s choices”, “and strengthen human capabilities” in a way which enables them to lead longer, healthier and fuller lives¹. From this broad definition of human development, one gets an idea of three critical issues involved in human development interpretation. These are: to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Barring these three crucial parameters of human development as a process enlarging people’s choices, there are additional choices that include political freedoms other guaranteed human rights, and various ingredients of self-respect. One may conclude unhesitantly that the absence of these essential choices debar or blocks many other opportunities that people should have in widening their choices. Human development is thus a process of widening people’s choices as well as raising the level of well-being achieved. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss Dr. B.R.Ambedkar on human development with reference to untouchables.

The Low Dignity and Status of the Untouchables

The other form of discrimination is the low level of dignity and the status of the untouchables. If a Hindu leader becomes a leader, then he prefers to be called a great Indian leader. No one describes him as the leader of Kashmir Brahmin even though he is one. If a leader who happens to be an untouchable is to be referred to as the leader of the untouchables. If a Hindu becomes a doctor, he is regarded as a great Indian



doctor. If a doctor happens to be untouchables he is regarded as the untouchable doctor. A Hindu singer is considered as a great Indian singer. If a singer person happens to be an untouchable, he would be regarded as an untouchable singer². Since the untouchables are the lowest of the low in Indian caste system, they are forced to do dirty jobs. Ashok Bharati writes: “The high castes want untouchables to clear their dead bodies but when it comes to accepting relief, they want to ensure that we are nowhere around because they cannot stomach the idea of sharing anything with the untouchables.” Mohan, a Dalit municipal cleaner says: “I am only doing what I would do for my own wife and children It is our duty. If a dog is dead, or a person, we have to clean it up.”

This type of discrimination has its origin in the Hindu view that the untouchables are inferior people and not qualified; their great men are only great among the untouchables. They can never be greater or even equal to the great men among the Hindus. This type of discrimination, though social in character, is no less than economic discrimination³.

Absence of Freedom

Discrimination is another name for absence of Freedom. Mr.Tawney says there is no such thing as freedom in the market, divorced from the realities of a specific time and place. Whatever else it may or may not imply, it involves the power of choice between alternatives-a choice which is real, not merely nominal, between alternatives which exist in fact, not only paper. It means, in short, the ability to do- or refrains from doing definite things at a definite moment, in definite circumstances, or it means nothing at all. Because a man is most a man when he thinks, wills and acts, freedom deserves the outline things, which poets have said about it; but as a part of the prose of every day life, it is quite practical and realistic. Every individual possesses certain requirements-ranging from the material necessities of existence to the need to express himself in speech and writing, to share in the conduct of affairs of common interest, and to worship God in his own way or to refrain from worshipping him- the satisfaction of which it is necessary to his welfare. Reduced to its barest essential, his freedom consist in the opportunity secured by him, within the limits set by nature and the enjoyment of similar opportunities by his fellows, to take the action needed to order, to ensure that these requirement are satisfied⁴.

There are two aspects that apply to all of them. In the first place, if the rights to vote, live, and to express oneself are to be effective guarantee of freedom, they must not be merely formed, but whenever the occasion arises to exercise them, they can in fact be exercised. In the second place, the rights that are essential to freedom must be such as to secure the liberties of all, not merely of a minority.



A society in which some groups can do what they please, while others can do little of what they ought, may have virtues of its own; but freedom is not one of them. Absence of freedom means affirm others by denying oneself. It is a state in which the untouchables are compelled to fulfil the will of others by negating one's will. It will be clear from an example. I have seen personally in some parts of Bihar, the Mushahars are forced by the landlord to work in their fields with very low wages. The landlords have no dignity and respect for the Mushahars⁵.

Problem of Isolation

The Hindu social structure is divided into two classes namely, caste-Hindus Savarna and Non-caste Hindus Avarna. Then again caste and non-caste Hindus are divided into many sub-divisions. They create the Hindu social order because they want to limit the benefit to themselves and not to share with the untouchables. They want to preserve superior self-image. They want to become rich⁶.

It is obvious that these classes Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras are natural allies. If they come together, they can overthrow the established Hindu social order. But they have not done it. It is not that no attempt has been made to unite them. Non-Brahmin party, which ruled between 1919-1935, was an attempt to unite them into one political organization to destroy the dominance of the Brahmins who are the architects of the Hindu social order. The labours leader made another attempt particularly the communists. They preached that there is an identity of interest of the working class, no matter to what community they belonged. But they developed in them class consciousness and class unity. The labour leaders were of the opinion that the working could use their terrifying power to break down the economic order. Once the economic order falls to the ground the social order of the Hindu is bound to go to pieces. The result is that the solidarity has failed to come. The Shudras and the Primitive Tribes are more hostile to the untouchables than they are to the Brahmins. Indeed it is the Shudras who act as the police force of the Brahmins for repelling of the untouchables on the Hindu social order. The atrocities that are committed upon the untouchables are all the doings of the Shudras. The reason for this want of solidarity is not far to seek. It is found in the system of graded inequality where the Brahmin is above everybody; the Shudras is below the Brahmin and above the untouchables⁷.

If the Hindu social order were based on inequality, it would have been overthrown long ago. But it is based on graded inequality so that the Shudras while he is anxious to pull down the Brahmin, he is not prepared to see the untouchables rise to his level. He prefers to suffer the indignities heaped upon him by the Brahmins. The reason is that, there are very few people to join the untouchables



in their struggle. The untouchables are not only isolated by the Brahmins but also by the very classes who ought to be their natural allies oppose them. This isolation is more obstacles in the removal of unsociability.

Means for the Emancipation of Untouchables

The emancipation of the untouchables began by establishing an association called the Bahishkrut Hitkarni Sabha (Depressed Classes' Welfare Association) on 20th, July 1924 at Parel in Bombay. The aim of this association was to make the untouchables aware of their miserable plight, their legitimate rights and to arouse among them consciousness of their rights. In pursuance of this aim, Ambedkar gave them a three-pronged: "Educate, Organize and Agitate".⁹⁶ His direct participation and commitment to the movement for the upliftment of the untouchability is remarkable. He took different means for their emancipation.

Education: A Means for the Emancipation

Ambedkar was convinced that education alone could emancipate the untouchables. The establishment of the Siddharth college in Bombay in 1945 and the Millind college at Aurangabad in 1951 stand witness to his endeavor to make higher education not only available to the depressed classes but also to put the rails of the administration of such educational institutions in their hands. Ambedkar realized that the significance of organized activity to carry forward his movement. He considered education to be essential for all men and women irrespective of their social and economic status. All men and women must get at least the minimum education so that they may know how to read and write. The primary education caters to the minimum essential need of educating the masses⁸.

Education provides strength and opportunity for them to fight against poverty, disease, and backwardness. According to him the purpose of education was to help the students to study the situation critically. Therefore, education should be scientific, detached, and impartial in character. In the realm of higher education, Ambedkar was in favour of giving teachers necessary freedom to frame their own syllabus and assess the performance of their students. He was opposed to prescribing and following a rigidly structured syllabus. He gave emphasis on promoting education and research in universities rather than converting them into conducting examination and degree distributing bodies.

He founded people's Education Society on 8th, July 1945 with a view to advancing the educational interest of the downtrodden sections of the Indian society in general and the Scheduled Castes in particular. He considered education the most powerful agent for bringing about desired changes in



society. For him education was as instrument to liberate the Dalits from illiteracy, ignorance and superstition and thus enable them to fight against all forms of injustice, exploitation and oppression.

He believed that untouchables had to attain political power. They had to have training in political participation and the electoral politics. With this objective, he established the Independent Labour Party in 1936 and the scheduled caste federation in 1942. He contested elections on the plank of these political parties .He gave the call “be a ruling class”⁹.

Social Emancipation

It was Ambedkar who ultimately succeeded to give legal rights of equality and social justice to millions of suffering masses of the untouchables and the exploited. This unique achievement was largely due to Ambedkar’s efforts, and he, therefore, rightly can be called the liberator of the helpless untouchables and the tribals of India, who were treated for centuries no better than so many sects of condemned subhuman’s. Ambedkar was, on occasions, found to be too aggressive, arrogant, and extremely uncompromising in his attitude. He deliberately preferred to keep himself away from the mainstream of the freedom movement, as its leadership appeared to him to be exclusively in the hands of the people who predominantly belonged to the upper castes. He also published a paper as the mouthpiece of his organization on 21st, January 1920. It was first named Mook Nayak (Dumb-Leader) and then Bahiskrit Bharat (Outcaste India). He, in his weekly paper, Mook Nayak (the leader of the Dumb or the voice of the Dumb) wrote It is imperative to suggest ways and means to redress the wrongs done to the depressed classes and to discuss the measures for their upliftment. A journal reaching the mass is the best means to achieve this end. In this manner Dr. Ambedkar took upon himself the responsibility of rousing the conscious of the people.

He was not unaware of the social movements organized by Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda, and Vivekananda for reforming the caste-character of the Hindu society. But it appeared to Ambedkar that the approach for religious reformation of the Hindu society for elimination of caste-events and giving the status of social equality to the untouchables or the depressed classes would not be more effective than the political approach to deal with this deeply entrenched caste-conservatism among the Hindus. He, therefore, decided to organize his movement primarily along political lines.

Through the medium of his journals like Janata renamed as Prabuddha Bharat Ambedkar endeavored to educate the people on social, political, historical, religious, educational, economic, and other problems of the downtrodden people of India. His writing’s breathed rationalism and humanism, and they revolutionized the outlook of the untouchables, completely as never before.



Ambedkar adopted a two-fold programme for his movement. The first programme was meant to propagate the cause of the untouchables and unite them under the banner of an organization' and question the very religious concept and justification of the caste system. Though as an untouchable, he was not allowed to study Sanskrit in his school days; nevertheless, in later days, he himself defiantly mastered the Sanskrit language to study the Hindu-religious books, particularly those Sastras that justified the system of caste stratification of the Hindu society. He wrote a number of books like Annihilation of Caste, Who Were the Sudras and How They came to be the Fourth Varna in Indo-Aryan Society? The Untouchables, Who Are They And Why They Became Untouchables? etc. He, thus, daringly challenged the religious validity and the precepts behind the caste system at its very Sastric root. This created immense self-confidence among untouchables, who were made to suffer from a crippling inferiority complex¹⁰.

He asked the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes to forget all about the sins of their ancestors and strongly pleaded with them not to wait for their fictitious rebirth for the alleviation of their sufferings. He urged them that their social liberation must be ensured in this very life and that too as their legitimate right as free citizen¹¹.

Political Movement

Ambedkar believed that by getting the recognition of the Depressed Class as a separate minority community like the Muslims from the British Raj, it would be easier to gain political power and consequent legal rights of equality and social justice for the untouchables and the outcaste. He, therefore, decided not only to ask for legally recognized status of minority community for the Depressed Class but also for introducing the system of separate electorate for choosing their representations to legislature. For this purpose he submitted a memorandum to the Indian statutory Commission, which was set up by the British government in 1928. In 1930 the Round Table Conference was convened by the British rule for Indian Administrative reform. Ambedkar was nominated by the British Government to this conference for representing the interests of the Depressed Class before it. In the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar claimed a separate minority state with right for separate electorate for the Depressed Class.

Ambedkar gave the evidence in a written statement to the Franchise committee, on 27th January. He pleaded for communal representation, saying Communal representation is a device to ward off the evil effect of the division by the words, evil effect of the division he clearly meant the evil effect of caste and untouchability. He further stated that the interests of the untouchables can be represented by the untouchables alone. There is distinctly their own interest and none else can truly voice them.

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The British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald readily accepted the demand of Ambedkar and announced it in the communal Award of 1932. He was of the opinion that the untouchables should be regarded citizens. According to him, citizenship means a bundle of rights such as personal liberty, personal security; right to hold private property, equality before law, liberty of conscience, freedom of opinion, speech, right of assembly, right of representation in a country's government and right to hold office under the state¹².

Urging the Depressed Class to participate in the politics and legislatures of the country, Ambedkar said: "I am in a situation in which Tilak was once placed .As long as the opponents curse me; it is taken for granted that my work for you is on the right lines and is justified. During the last two thousand years never was such an attempt made to annihilate untouchability".

The untouchables are now convinced that the demand for Swaraj and the cause of the Hindus will suffer for want of support from the depressed Classes. Ambedkar said that whatever the Hindus do for you is not out of charity or mercy. They do it for their own welfare as well. The mission of our movement is to fight out tyranny, injustice and false traditions, and to undo all privileges and release the harassed people from bondage. Our cause has gained recognitions because of our ceaseless struggle.

Addressing the women he said never regard yourselves as untouchables. Live a clean life. Dress yourselves like the touchable ladies. Never mind if your dresses is full of patches, but see that it is clean. None can restrict your ornaments. Attent more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self help.

Ambedkar recommended to the Minority Committee of the Round Table Conference that the Depressed Classes couldn't consent subjecting themselves to majority rule in their present state of hereditary bondsmen. Before majority rule is established their emancipation from the system of untouchability must be an accomplished fact. It must not be left to the will of the majority .The Depressed Classes must be made free citizens entitled to all the rights of citizenship in common with other citizens of the state.112 Ambedkar writes: "In slavery the master at any rate had the responsibility to feel cloths, and house the slave and keep him in good conditions lest the market value of the slave should decrease, But in the system of untouchability, the Hindus takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchables."

Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation. That is because there is no independent public opinion to

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condemn it and there is no impartial machinery of administration to retain it. There is no appeal to public opinion, for whatever public there is, it is the opinion of the Hindus who belong to the exploiting class and as such favor exploitation. The Communal Award was a great triumph for Ambedkar. However, for Gandhiji it was a threat to divide the Hindu community with a sinister imperialist design to weaken the main base of the freedom movement. The Mahatma, who was then imprisoned, started fast unto death to save the unity of the Hindu society by preserving the system of joint electorate for all Hindus. The whole country was anxiously waiting for a positive response from Ambedkar, who was in a dilemma either to yield to the moral appeal of the Mahatma or stick to the political gains that he thought he had achieved for the Scheduled Castes. Ultimately, he agreed to give up the claim for separate electorate for the Scheduled castes and consented to retain the system of joint electorate along with the other communities of the Hindu society. Gandhiji on his part liberally conceded to increase the number of reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes from 78, as it was fixed in the Communal Award to a much higher figure of 148. This settlement between Gandhiji and Ambedkar is known in history as the Poona Pact. Ambedkar later wrote concerning why he succumbed to the moral appeal of Gandhiji. "There was before me a duty, which I owed as part of the common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfied to Gandhiji".

Till that time Ambedkar was looked upon as a sectional leader of the Depressed Class only, but after the Poona Pact everybody expected him to play the role of a national leader by joining the mainstream of the national movement for India's freedom. However, Ambedkar thought it to be more prudent to rely on the gesture of the British Raj for enhancing the interests of the Scheduled Castes, although his policy was not wholly supported by his own community in recording their verdict in the general election of 1937. Ambedkar might have been criticized for showing an obsession on issues pertaining to the interests of the Scheduled Castes. But he could never be accused of not being a true Indian and a genuine nationalist.

Constitutional Safeguards

In his changed evaluation of the new political realities Ambedkar decided to enter into the constituent Assembly for making efforts to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes by using this highest forum of democratic decision-making. In his maiden speech, he made a remarkable critical analysis of the



discourse of Pandit Nehru when the latter moved the main resolution on the aims and objectives of the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar's style of delivery, constitutional acumen, moderate approach, and nationalist perspectives deeply impressed the Members of the constituent Assembly. He was soon appointed a member of the Seven-Member Drafting Committee for the preparation of the Constitution and then made its Chairman. It was not an act of any concession to assuage the sentiments of the Scheduled Castes that this highest position in the preparation body of the Constitution was given to Ambedkar. It was done in genuine appreciation of his exceptional ability to handle the stupendous task of framing the Constitution of India.

It has been admitted by all that Ambedkar played the role of the principal architect of the Constitution of free India .He was advised, assisted and guided on many issues by two other architects namely Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel who conceptualized the basic principles, provisions and objectives of the Constitution. It was the moment of highest achievement and happiness for Ambedkar, when the resolutions on Directive Principles and Fundamental Constitution declare: "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste sex place of birth or any of them."Article 21 says "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law." Again Article 17 of the Constitution states: "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. His enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance law."

It is indeed like a charter of legal rights of liberty for the untouchables. A Scheduled caste member of the Constituent Assembly significant observed after the adoption of the constitution it is an irony of fate that the man who was driven from one school to another, who was forced to take his lesson outside the classroom, has been entrusted with the great job of framing the constitution of free and independent India, and it is he who finally dealt a fatal death-blow to the custom of untouchability, of which he was himself a victim in his younger days.

After the adoption of the constitution, all the Members of the Constituent Assembly showered lavish praises on Ambedkar. In reply, he said in all humility I came into the Constituent Assembly with no greater aspiration than the safeguard the interest of the Scheduled Castes. I had not the remotest idea that I would be called upon to undertake more responsible function. I am grateful to the Constituent Assembly and Drafting Committee for reposing so much trust and confidence in me and giving me.



Ambedkar adopted several means for the upliftment and betterment of the untouchables. Institutions like Bahishkrut Hitkarni Sabha (Depressed Classes' Welfare Association). Siddharth College and Millind Colleg are imparting education based on equality for all the people of all sections. Even today, his dream of classless society is being carried through such institutions¹³.

Conclusion

Untouchability is one of the major problems of our country. It has its roots in the Indian society that is based on the caste system. The castes are further divided into sub-castes. The people of the lowest caste are treated untouchables. They do not belong to the fold of Hinduism. Nobody knows exactly about the origin of untouchability or the caste system itself. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is considered a hero by millions of India's oppressed Other Backward Castes or Lowered Castes and Dalits. He was India's 20th century crusader against the caste system. He was a statesman, national leader, and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Because of the efforts taken by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar on human development with reference to untouchables, their status has improved though they are not able to have a status equivalent to other communities.

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