



Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR – A SOCIO RELIGIOUS REFORMER OF INDIA



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ABSTRACT

Like Buddha, Mahaveera, Phule and Gandhi, Ambedkar also a great socio religious reformer of India. As a great son of India was belonged to untouchable community who served for the cause of nation building of this subcontinent. He emerged as an angry fighter for the cause of the suppressed sections of society. A great critic of Hindu social order, he opposed the practice of untouchability, a cruel system of slavery. Apart from being a crusader of the oppressed, he was an economist, able administrator, educationist and visionary. His constant fight for social change and social equality has no parallel in world history. Ambedkar is rightly considered to be one of the major spokesmen of the depressed classes in India. He certainly was not the first to start the movement of social emancipation and political mobilization of the sixty million people of the oppressed strata, but he was perhaps more effective in highlighting the inhuman treatment of the untouchable caste Hindus. In this context the present paper discussing the socio religious reformations of India in general and the role and contributions of Ambedkar in particular.

KEY WORDS: Socio Reformer, Buddha, Mahaveera, Phule, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Mangaon, Nagapur, Untouchability,

INTRODUCTION

Ambedkar was a great socio religious reformer of India like Buddha, Mahaveera, Phule, Gandhi and others. As a great son of India was belonged to untouchable community who served for the cause of nation building of this subcontinent to a great extent. He emerged as an angry fighter for the cause of the suppressed sections of society. A great critic of Hindu social order, he opposed the practice of untouchability, a cruel system of slavery. Apart from being a crusader of the oppressed, he was an economist, able administrator, educationist and visionary. His constant fight for social change and social equality has no parallel in world history. Ambedkar is rightly considered to be one of the major spokesmen of the depressed classes in India. He certainly was not the first to start the movement of social emancipation and political mobilization

of the sixty million people of the oppressed strata, but he was perhaps more effective in highlighting the inhuman treatment of the untouchable caste Hindus. In this context the present paper discussing the socio religious reformations of India in general and the role and contributions of Ambedkar in particular.

DISCUSSION

Mangaon and Nagpur conferences constituted a unique chapter in the history of social reformation of India. On March 21, 1920, Ambedkar presided over a Conference of the untouchables at Mangaon in Kolhapur. Another important conference was held at Nagapur. This was the first All India Conference convened by untouchables. Ambedkar was fundamentally opposed to any organization started by the caste Hindus for the uplift



of depressed classes. At the conclusion of the conference, Ambedkar made an attempt in the direction of consolidating the forces of the Depressed Classes. According to Ambedkar, the institution of untouchability did not possess any divine sanction. Ambedkar also argued that there was no practice of untouchability during the Vedic period. He concluded that untouchability was born sometime in 400 A.D. He characterizes the caste system as an unnatural division of labor. The pernicious social status and predestination principles prohibit different castes from intermarrying. Keeping in view the implications of caste and the caste system, Ambedkar insisted on two elements. First one is the reform of the Indian family and the other, the reorganization and reconstruction of Indian society.

The problem of caste system, practices of untouchability, lower cadre of women position, sati, widow remarriage, child marriage, etc., relate to the social reform of the Hindu family. The abolition of caste system, abolition of untouchability, changes in the laws of marriages, adoption and succession relate to the larger sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu family. According to Manu, a wife was reduced to the level of a slave in the matter of property rights. She was also subject to corporal punishment as the husband had the right to beat his wife. Women did not have a choice in selecting her spouse: the father had the right to settle the marriage of his daughter. She had to worship the husband faithfully. Ambedkar was keenly concerned with the rights of the women. His concrete achievement in this direction was the initiation of the Hindu Civil Code. He proposed an excellent blending of reason and sacred tradition. Defending the proposal in the Hindu Civil Code, Ambedkar explained that the modification in the existing Hindu law was based on the Shastras and Smruties.

Another memorable struggle, to vindicate the right of the untouchables to take water from public watering places, was the "Cjpwadar Taml Agotatopm" and the "Mahad Satyagraha". The Chowdar Tank situated in the Mahad Town in the Colaba district of Bombay Presidency was handed over to the Mahad Municipality when the same was established in 1869. This tank which was the main source of water for the inhabitants of Mahad Town was banned for the untouchables. As a result in September 11, 1923, the Legislative Council of Bombay passed a resolution to the effect that the untouchable classes be allowed to use public wells and Dharmshalas which were built and maintained out of public funds. But in spite of the S.K.Bole resolution considerable number of local Boards and Municipalities did not grant civil rights to the Depressed Classes.

Ambedkar organised the untouchables to assert their legal right to take water from the Chowdar Tank. S.K.Bole moved another resolution on August 5; 1926. It was directed towards not giving grants to those municipalities and local Boards, which refused to give effect to the resolution on the subject passed by the council three years earlier. In this connection, a conference was held from 18 to 20th March 1927 at Mahad over 10,000 delegates attended the conference. In this presidential address Dr. Ambedkar exhorted the people to fight for the rights, give up their vicious habits and rise to full manhood. On 20th March, 1927, after the conference passed a resolution, a call was given to the conference to go to the Tank and exercise their right to take water from the tank. The Caste Hindus challenged this. A second conference was held in December 1927. The caste Hindus filed a petition in the Court of the sub judge of Mahad on 12th December 1927, and obtained a temporary injunction order, restraining the untouchables from going to the tank and taking water. But ultimately in the legal battle the caste Hindus lost and the untouchables won the case.

The temple entry movement which started with Vaikom satyagraha in 1924, in Travancore State spread to different parts of the country. The spade work done by the Mahad satyagraha provided a fill-up for the temple entry movement in Bombay presidency. Ten days before the Dandi March of Gandhi, Ambedkar, launched his Temple entry movement in Bombay presidency. Ambedkar also resorted to satyagraha for getting Hindu Temples thrown open to the untouchables. The Parvathi Satyagraha in Poona in 1920-30, and the Ambabi Temple satyagraha in Amaravathi were led by Ambedkar. Nasik satyagraha was one of the most important ones. Ambedkar launched a struggle for Kalaram Mandir temple entry at Nasik. The satyagraha was planned for 2 March 1930. A satyagraha committee headed by Dada Sahib B.K. Gaekwad made elaborate arrangements for the agitation. More than 15,000 volunteers assembled at Nasik to participate in the satyagraha. The agitators marched in a mile-long procession towards the gates of the Temples with a band on the front, followed by five hundred women volunteers. They reached the Temple gate and found that all the gates were closed with heavy police bandobast. The processionists then proceeded to a venue at Godavari gate. When the Satyagrahis attempted to reach the Chariot, some caste Hindus attacked them with stones and lathis injuring a number of them including Ambedkar. The agitation continued in spite of violent resistance and the Temple remained closed for a whole year. Attempts were made to side track the main issue of inhuman treatment

to a harijan by the means of the so called temple entry right for them in. Dr. Subbrayan's bill and the bill of Ranga Iyer. Ambedkar flatly condemned the Bills as they did not condemn untouchability as a sin. In spite of Gandhi's request, he refused to give full support to such an idea. He regarded eradication of untouchability more important than erection of Temples or entering the temples.

Another important struggle to Mahar Watan land system was started in 1928. According to the hereditary office Act, the Mahars holders of certain posts, were required to work all day and night, and in the absence of a Mahar servant, his father or any other member of his family was required to work in the service of the government. For this hard work they got a piece of land as Watan, some corn from the villagers and a pittance of a remuneration varying from two annas to a rupee and a half per mensem. The result of the Watan system was that the Mahars lost self-respect, and they were tied down to these trifling manual jobs. The practice kept down the Mahar community. Ambedkar emphasised that there was no use in amending the Act. He was for abolishing the system itself. He impressed upon the minds of his community that instead of living on small crumbs, his community should bring barren land under cultivation and maintain itself. On March 19, 1928 Ambedkar introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council to amend the Bombay Hereditary Office Act 1874. At several meetings and conferences he explained the objectives of the Bill. While moving the bill in the Bombay Legislative Council in August 3, 1928, he brought to the notice of the house that the lands were given to the Mahars by the ancient emperors of the country. The Bill was refused to select committee. The committee submitted its report in June 1929. The bill was passed and the Mahars were permitted to transform the Watan lands of Mahars in to ryotwari lands and to pay monthly wages to the Mahars, to make them do only the government servants against treatments as inferior employees.

Ambedkar again introduced a Bill at the Poona Session of the Bombay Legislative Council in Sept. 17, 1937, with the aim to abolish Mahar Watan System. He wanted to solve the problem of Mahar Watan's through constitutional measures. When Ambedkar was nominated to the Viceroy's Executive Council (1942), he withdrew the struggle for the abolition of Mahar Watan System. He believed that he must be able to serve the cause better as a member of the Viceroy Executive Council. But unfortunately Ambedkar was not able to solve this problem. As a result he started the Bombay State inferior Village Watan Association on June 6, 1956 to fight for the

cause. But the caste Hindus opposed this move. In spite of their opposition the agitation of the Bombay State inferior Village Watan Association continued. Finally the Mahar Watan System was abolished under the Bombay inferior village Watan Abolition Act of 1959. Ambedkar started the depressed classes welfare league, in 1924. It undertook the task of ventilating the grievances of the untouchables and demanding greater educational facilities for them. It was largely at his instance that in 1928, the government tried to abolish forced labor for the Mahar Community. Ambedkar also injected a spirit of self-respect in the veins of humble beings and inspired them to give up evil practices like carrion and the skinning of dead animals. In 1935 he took the decision of leaving Hinduism. He propagated that the depressed classes should gain political rights to improve their conditions. He demanded reserved seats for the untouchables in the executive and legislature, public services and education and he finally appealed to the untouchable community to sever their connection with Hinduism. He described the untouchables as a separate element in the National life. The movement started by Ambedkar was treated as a Separate Movement.

In the earlier phase, leaders from other communities sponsored the movement for the uplift of the untouchables as well. But Ambedkar's efforts were rather serious and relentless since he happened to be a victim of stratification of the caste system. Ambedkar did achieve the object of inculcating the consciousness of civil rights among the untouchables. But the emergence of this consciousness stands as an isolated phenomenon marked by an attitude of confrontation rather than co-operation. Ambedkar perhaps was aware of the Villages System that was the parent of all the ills of the Scheduled Caste. He also visualized basic socio-economic changes in the rural economy as a pre requisite for the uplift of the depressed classes. Ambedkar succeeded in breaking tradition and showing a new path for the depressed community.

Ambedkar's contribution as one of the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution is reflected in its various articles seeking to promote social equality and economic freedom. Ambedkar was one of the few National leaders in India, who were actively associated with all the socio-political reforms and deliberation of self-governing and constitution making. He ably served as Chairman of the Drafting Committee and proved his genius as an eminent constitutionalist. His role in the making of Indian Constitution was widely acknowledged and highly praised. He was one of the chief architects of the Indian

Constitution. Though Ambedkar's Social reform movement, (started in 1920's) was primarily for the emancipation of the untouchables, its importance lies in the fact that its benefits have not been confined to them alone. This movement which articulated the socio-political rights of the untouchables culminated in the constitutional provisions for the formal equality to all and special dispensation to the historically disabled groups, in particular the Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes.

The whole nation remembers Ambedkar as a social reformer who worked hard to secure social justice. That is why the centenary year of birth was declared as 'year of social justice'. This is a great honor conferred on a great social reformer. He rightly emphasized on voting power as a political weapon. He almost succeeded in convincing the British Government that separate electorate was the need of the hour for empowering the untouchables. His mission was eradication of untouchability and securing political, economic and social justice through appropriate political action. He bargained with the British for adequate constitutional safeguards in the form of a separate electorate. But he had to accept the qualified system of joint electorate.

CONCLUSION

When Ambedkar entered the Constituent Assembly, he entered it as a 'protestant'. He had never thought he was to be the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. As a matter of fact he was surprised by an offer to him by the Congress leaders Chairmanship of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. His main goal was to safeguard the rights of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. But with his elevation as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he was entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the rights of every Indian, including the Scheduled Castes and providing a form of government and society based on the principle of justice - social, political and economic.

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