



## Journey from marginalization to egalitarianism in ambedkerite India

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### ABSTRACT

Present paper attempts to elucidate how Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, under the influence of Jyotiba Phule and other social reformers, has changed the lives of numerous people in India by his revolutionary moments to improve the conditions of the socio-economically backward people of India. He descended on the land of India as an incarnation of another god who brought a sea change in the position of the Dalits, suppressed, oppressed and exploited people. He was a prophet or a god for all the marginalized, downtrodden, underprivileged or people of minority groups who were living a life in abject poverty, destitute, social-atrocities and caste-discriminations. He was a multi-dimensional personality being a jurist, politician, philosopher, administrator, historian and economist. He himself was born into a poor Mahar caste which was considered as untouchable at that time. He personally realized that agony and campaigned against racial discrimination prevalent in India. He succeeded in his efforts and cadged what he wanted. He gave new directions to Dalits to live with pride and dignity. How Dalits of India cherish equal status and rights present days due to this Ambedkarite Movement, is the key-note of this paper.

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### Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, generally known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, is *Messiah* for Dalits, outcastes, backward-classes, downtrodden, underprivileged and people of minority groups and that's why became the victim of calumny of Hindus also to some extent. He was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1891 in the town of Mhow, now in Madhya Pradesh in India. According to Balakrishna Hedge, "Some called him Moses, some Abraham Lincoln and some Booker T. Washington" (Hedge 147). He was a great politician, educationist, social-reformer, journalist, humanist, economist, administrator and an eminent jurist. He was born to Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. He was the fourteenth and last child of his untouchable parents who belonged to Mahar caste. The people of this caste were considered untouchables. He had personally felt the social-discrimination though his father served in the Indian Army at the Mhow Cantonment as a Subedar and he belonged to an affluent family. His father later joined a military school as a headmaster. His mother was an illiterate lady. But Bhimrao was a great personality. In the words of S. N. Mishra, "Born in nineteenth century, Dr. Ambedkar shines like a luminous star in the galaxy of great men" (Mishra 13). At other place Roy also comments almost same with Mishra's statement, "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar dazzled like a brightest star on the Indian firmament during the span of about four decades of his truly extraordinary public life from 1918 to 1956" (Roy 79). He belonged to a well-to-do family as not his father but his grandfather also was in the British Army. When his father retired from army in 1894 his family moved to Satara. His mother died after a period. His father remarried and they moved to Mumbai where Ambedkar did his matriculation in 1908. His father died in 1912 when he was doing his B. A. Ambedkar had good knowledge as he had been the student of University of Mumbai, Columbia University, University of London and London School of Economics. He is the winner of most prestigious Bharat-Ratna Award in 1990. He remained the

chairman of Constitution Drafting Committee from 1947 to 1950 and first minister of law of justice from 1947 to 1951 in the Cabinet of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. On October 23, 1929 during his visit to Chalisgaon, he met with an accident. He was badly wounded and injured. He was confined to bed until his death on 6 December, 1956 in Delhi in India.

### Stringent experiences of caste-ridden society

Bhimrao Ambedkar had to face the caste-discrimination since he was a child and had to endure it till his death. That's why he devoted his life for the Dalits so that this caste-discrimination may be uprooted. Ambedkar was badly humiliated as a boy when he was in his army school run by the British Government. As he belonged to Mahar caste and this caste was considered a low-caste and even the teachers segregated these children from the high-class students especially from Brahmins and other high classes fearing social outcry. They had no identity of their own in the school as they were totally depended on the high-caste students for any work. C. G. John advocates about Dalit identity, "A second trend is an increasing assertion of Dalit identity as a positive thing, a source of pride rather than of shame" (John 17). Sometimes these untouchable students were not allowed to sit in the class. Bhimrao used to sit in a corner of the class-room so that he may not touch other high-caste students and pollute them. If they sat on floor they had to carry gunny bags to sit as they were not allowed to sit on the benches. The teachers did not pay attention towards the Dalit students and did not help them in their studies and did not even check their note-books in the fear of being get polluted. If Dalit students were thirsty, they were not allowed to drink water or even touch the water container as nobody from high class would drink this polluted water if they touch either water or container. They had fear from these castes as the people of these castes were dominant. Dalit students waited for any boy of high caste so that he may pour water on their hands jointly taken together to drink water. This work of pouring the water to these thirsty children was generally done by the village peon and

Dalit students waited for him to pour water in their palms and if the peon was absent or busy, then they had to go without water. Ambedkar says on such situation "*No peon, No Water*" (Reference 9). Ambedkar told that the school experiences were very bad for him as "He had to sit on a gunny sack which he had to take home with him. The use of the words 'begar and other similar forms of forced labour' contemplate a prohibition against work of an involuntary nature without payment" (Srivastava 16).

After his father's death when the family moved to Satara, then there was no change in the positions of Dalits. He had to face this social and religious discrimination wherever he went as a student or an employee. He had to suffer the ignominy of Dalit discrimination in the offices also. He had to face humiliation even by the peons as once they threw documents on his face. As he belonged to Dalit community, he was not given water during official functions. He had to sit in a corner and away from other high-class employees in the offices. He was not given accommodation like others. When he stayed in an inn owned by Parsis and they came to know that he belonged to Dalit community, they came with sticks in their hands and cried that he has polluted their inn. He told him to leave the inn immediately if he wanted to go scot free from there. He pleaded them to let him stay for a few days until he gets a government bungalow but they did not allow him for this and he had to leave the inn in frustration and had to spend the day in a public garden. In a dejected mood he had to leave for Bombay by the 9 pm train.

#### **Quest for social-reformation**

After these horrendous and shameful experiences, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar determined to work for the cause of Dalits of India. These bad experiences paved the way to raise the voice against this social discrimination. When Bhimrao completed his education, he thought to improve the conditions of the Dalits of India. When he returned from the USA and UK after completing his studies, he had to join the Baroda State Service in 1917 as he was sent there on these terms. He worked as a secretary in the defense office of the Maharaja of Baroda State. He did some other good jobs also but he found the same environment almost everywhere. Having inspired from these bad experiences, he founded the *Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha* (Depressed Class Institute) to improve the conditions of Dalits. According to Roy, "Ambedkar's unique idea of social justice emanated from his vision of an ideal society or *samata samaj*, based on social order or equality, unity or justice (Roy 80). Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar became a social activist and he met with some leaders who were also working for the Dalit-upliftment. Narayan Guru (1854-1928), Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), and Ramaswamy Naicker (1879-1973) are the names who strived hard for the Dalit rights. He was a man of intellect and he did much for the Indian economy and agricultural problems, "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar published a number of articles on economic problems, particularly the problem of agricultural economy of the country. Among the various problems of agricultural economy in India, he has concentrated on agricultural production. He explained close relationship between agricultural production, productivity and size of land holding" (Ingle 21). He had to fight for the Dalits and downtrodden because they lived in "dark, insanitary and miserable smoky shanties or cottages" (Keer 1). The high class Hindus were rich and dominant at that time and these poor people were not allowed to live their lives as liberated human beings as many restrictions were put on them, "These untouchable Hindus were denied the use of public wells, and were condemned to drink any filthy water they could find. Their

children were not admitted to schools attended by the caste Hindu children...the Hindu temples were closed for them. Barbers and washer men refused to render them service"(Keer 1-2). Not only this they were considered inferior even than animals, "The untouchable Hindus were treated by the caste Hindus as Sub humans, less than men, worse than beasts" (Keer 2).

#### **Persistent struggle and movements for dalit-upliftment**

Dr. Ambedkar devoted his whole life for the poor Dalit people. He started writing against the caste-discrimination in several periodicals like *Mook Nayak*, *Vahishkrit Bharat*, and *Equality Janta* and in this way he tried for the safeguards the rights of Dalits. He started movements and *satyagrahas* so that he may do something in the welfare of Dalits. Vaikom Satyagraha in Travancore in Maharashtra advocated Dalit right to worship in Hindu temples without the objection of the Hindus. Mahad March was a movement asserted freedom to take water from the Hindu wells. Rally for taking water from the Chowdar tank was a big success under the banner of Dalit *messiah* Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. This Chowdar tank of Mahad was made a public tank in 1869. Resolutions were passed in the favour of Dalits in 1920s and they were allowed to take water from this well. The Hindus tried to oppose this but Dalits were determined for their rights this time and ultimately the Hindus ran away thinking that now the situation is out of control. Numerous Dalits headed by Ambedkar marched in the streets in a rally and it was a big success for them. In this way Dalits drank the water from Chowdar tank for the first time. Kelaram temple entry in Nasik, Maharashtra was another movement under his guidance. Not only this, he fought for the rights of poor workers, labourers and peasants. He formed his Independent Labour Party in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. The Independent Labour Party worked for the labour class and peasants. The demand for safeguards and protection of Scheduled Castes (earlier called Depressed Class) has a long history dating to Montague-Chelmsford Reform of 1919 during the British Raj period was to preserve the rights of Scheduled-castes. He helped the peasants by his lands reforms. Ingle contends, "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a strong advocate of land reforms and of a prominent role for the state in economic development. Dr. Ambedkar recognized the inequities in an unfettered capitalist economy" (Ingle 22). Ambedkar was determined to give safety and security to the Scheduled Caste people. At Round Table Conference in London as a delegate, he asked for separate electorate for the Dalits. In the Indian constitution what he did for these people is really praiseworthy and highly appreciated. He joined the Union Cabinet of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946 and he resigned on 27 September 1951 due to issue of the Hindu Code Bill. This bill was very important reform of Hindu law with proposals on marriage, divorce, and monogamy.

#### **As an architect of Indian constitution**

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is an architect of our constitution. He put all his energy in drafting the constitution in such a way so that scheduled caste and backward class people may be benefitted from it. He liberated the weak, depressed and exploited classes and gave life to the silent and dead masses through his efforts. He considered Jyotiba Phule as his philosophical mentor and guide who was a pioneer social-reformer and activist. Indian constitution is based on equality. In the dream of egalitarian society, he advocated democracy where '*one person, one vote*'; and '*one vote, one value*'. Dr. Ambedkar was invited by Nehru government to serve as the nation's first law minister. He got a good chance to serve India. Subsequently,

he became the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee to draft the Constitution for independent India. There were other several eminent intellectuals, educationists, political leaders and social-activists for this post but he was chosen for this cumbersome task. He took around two and half years for the drafting of our constitution. Though it was a collaborative work but its sole credit is given to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as he worked on it consistently and devotedly. During the course of its drafting he spent many sleepless nights as it was a Herculean task. He tried to ensure justice, equality and fraternity to all. He developed reservation system for the Dalits which was highly appreciated in the Dalit communities. Balkrishna Hedge contends, "Many countries as on today have reservation policy regarding employment, educational and housing opportunities for the poor and the different types of religious, linguistic and other forms of minorities. In other words, reservation is accepted as a policy instrument to create economic and social opportunities for the welfare of the discriminated and oppressed class" (Hedge 145). The poor people of low-castes under Dalit categories did not send their children for education in schools as they were not allowed to read in those schools where high-caste students read. Dr. Bhimrao gave reservation for them not only in education but in jobs also. This work was highly appreciated by the Dalits of India. This "reservation of jobs and seats in educational institutions on low caste basis has been accepted as an instrument of social justice to provide equal opportunities for the depressed and backward classes in India. This is an important contribution of Dr. Ambedkar not only for SC's but also for the upliftment of other backward classes and women" (Hedge 146). Social, political, religious, educational, suffragette rights were given to all equally. He drafted the constitution in this way so that Dalits, backward classes, scheduled-castes, Adivasis, minorities and women may also be benefitted from it. Thus, he became a ray of hope for life for all these people of India. He gave equal rights for women to educate and vote for any leader of their choice. In fact, he had to resign from the Union ministry on an issue that undermined the women rights. He gave all freedom to live their lives equally whether a rich or poor, high or low-caste. Religious freedom, the abolition of untouchability, socio-economical equality, women rights, Dalit reservations etc. are some great efforts done for these neglected people. Dr. Ambedkar was against Article 370 of the Constitution. This article gives a special Status to the state Jammu and Kashmir but against his wishes this proposal was turned down and till date Jammu and Kashmir has its new constitution and it has become the root cause of conflict between India and Pakistan.

### Conclusion

To conclude, Dr. Ambedkar descended on the land of India as a *messiah* or prophet for the Dalits and minority groups. His

long struggle, movements, painstaking efforts in drafting the constitution for the sake of neglected poor people of India is a debt on all Indians. Women enjoy a respectable status in every walk of life; this could not have been without the efforts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the other social-reformers and activists. Dr. Ambedkar devoted his life for the Dalits. Their position has improved but at many places the condition of the Dalits has not even slightly changed. In the word of Balkrishna Hedge, "The incidence of poverty, unemployment and underemployment is very large among Harijans and Girijans. Therefore several programmes like the schemes of industrial training, assistance for setting up cottage and small-scale industrial units etc. have been undertaken to increase their physical resource base and to increase their standard of living and ensure social equity among them" (Hedge 146). Bhimrao Ambedkar also was inspired from Gandhi as he too lived a life like Gandhi. K. C. Das says, "Gandhi's gestures and activities had a long effect on the untouchables" (Das 62). He was an extraordinarily laborious that's why "When friends visited Ambedkar, he forgot all about the medical advice and entered into conversation" (Keer 243).

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