



Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar: Beyond 'The Messiah of Dalits'

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Introduction:

The history of India, which is mythologized to some extent, does not provide many clues to the direct protests of the oppressed masses against their oppression. But it is inconceivable that they did not take place at all for a long period of some two thousand years, as it could result in incurring 'divine wrath and consequent ruination of the prospects of getting a better birth in their next life' as preached in the *shastras* of Hinduism. Thus the Indian society was held in a metaphysical engagement by the caste system and at the same time in physical alienation with itself. Since, this superstructure was pivoted on the religio-ideological foundation; the manifestation of resistance to the caste system always used the metaphysical toolkit that contrived its arguments into the religious form. One finds articulation of opposition to the caste system materialising in a religio-ideological idiom, right from the early revolts like Buddhism and Jainism down to the Bhakti movement in the medieval age. The religious discourse is a common feature of all the anti-caste movements, like the Satnami movement of the *Chamars* in the Chhattisgarh plains in Eastern Madhya Pradesh, the Dravid Kazhagam movement of Periyar EVR Ramaswamy Naicker, the Nadar Mahajana Sabha in Tamilnadu (Hardgrave 1969); the Ezhava movement of Narayana Guru.

The most pervasive among all these, was the movement, led by Babasaheb Ambedkar. Reaching its climax of mass conversion to Buddhism; this movement signify an overriding hatred for the religious code of Manu and a proposition of an alternate faith for themselves. It essentially embodied dejection with the Brahminism, which was perceived to be the root cause for their sufferings. The most articulate expression of this dejection is found in Ambedkar's own analyses that hold overthrowing of 'Hindu' religious ideological hegemony as a necessary condition for the liberation of Dalits.

The messiah of dalits and downtrodden, Dr. Ambedkar was a remarkable leader, jurist and politician. He was one of the main architects of the Indian Constitution. Babasaheb Ambedkar, as his followers called him, lovingly, fought for the rights of dalits and other socially backward classes, his entire life. He was appointed as the nation's first Law Minister and was a crucial and irreplaceable member of PM Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet. In 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, which is India's highest civilian honour. Ambedkar was a great leader who disdained concepts of untouchability and caste restrictions. Born in the family of 'untouchables' he could relate himself to the pain his community had to endure and vowed to fight till the very end. Dr B R Ambedkar's contribution to the society can never be forgotten. He was and will always remain one of the pivotal pillars of Indian democracy.

In this article, I have tried to emphasise the fact that, Ambedkar was a multi-faceted personality. Although he is often regarded as the 'Messiah of Dalits' with regard to his contribution for the upliftment of the downtrodden classes, his work in other fields like women- emancipation, as an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, views on Pakistan, views on Indian history, secularism, communism may not be overlooked.

Ambedkar's thoughts on economy:

The main concern of Ambedkar was the nature of land acquisition and its fragmentation and division. He criticized the current definition of economic perception, which was defined by that approach. He commented, "Therefore, any definition, which depends on consumption, is the nature of an economic structure which is an enterprise in production." The basic problem of Indian agriculture was that it was unable to generate surplus which ultimately led to capitalization and give birth to deficiency. As a result of this unskilled use of resources, surplus labour and unnecessary employment, there is adverse effect on the process of total economic development. Ambedkar believed that the process of consolidation of holdings can overcome the effect of neo-economy and result in farmers' progress. He supported development of industrialization and described the method of improving the industrialization. He said that industrialization facilitates consolidation; this is a barrier against future subdivision and consolidation.

Ambedkar believed that the state should acquire all agricultural land like owners', tenants' or mortgages' from private individuals and pay compensation to them. The state should have the requisite land for standard size farms and the residents of the villages should give fields for cultivation.

As far as his views on currency are concerned, Ambedkar was not in favour of linking the rupee with gold and had recommended setting up of fully managed in-convertible currency. He had proposed following reforms in Indian currency:

1. A limited devaluation would help the business class as well as the earning class. A very steep devaluation would harm the latter since they would be hit by high inflation if the fall in the rupee was too steep. In effect, he said that the interests of these two groups should be balanced while thinking of the value of the rupee, because a very steep devaluation would reduce real wages of the earning class because of inflation.
2. Indian currency should be changed every 10 years to tackle the problems of hoarding to black money to inflation.
3. The purchasing power of the rupee should be stabilised and that it should be the foremost motto of any nation. The fluctuation in the purchasing power of the rupee leads to devaluation along with increase in inflation, which ultimately affects the common man in the country.

With regard to the issue of labour problem in India, Ambedkar supported the trade union movement. He wanted a partnership for labourers in industrial management. He paid attention to the employment exchanges of the Joint Councils and earned leave for permanent workers, welfare activities, reconciliation and trade disputes. He helped untouchables get technical education in foreign countries. In the inaugural address of the Regional Labour Commissioner Conference, he said, "Three things are necessary to destroy or prevent industrial disorder - Machinery for harmony, amendment in the Trade Dispute Act and Minimum Wage Law." According to him, the feeling of industrial peace may only be possible, if it was based on social justice.

While discussing this problem, he had not only industrial labour but also agricultural labour in his mind. According to him, the provident fund should be open to the employer's liability, workers' compensation, illegal insurance pension, all types of health insurance for labour, whether it is industrial labour or agricultural labour.

Ambedkar's idea of social democracy:

Ambedkar's social view of democracy was very closely related to his ideal of "good society". He did not leave the space for any ambiguity. On many occasions, he said that, he envisaged a good society based on 'freedom, equality and brotherhood'. Democracy, as he had seen it, was both the end and the means of this ideal. This was the end because he finally referred to democracy as the achievement of freedom, equality and fraternity. At the same time, democracy was also a means through which these ideals were to be achieved. He emphasised that, democracy is not just a form of government; it is usually a way of staying connected with the masses. This is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence for sympathizers.

Another important feature of Ambedkar's concept of democracy is that it was ready for social change and human progress. He saw democracy as an instrument to prevent bad people from capturing power. In one of the most inspirational definitions of the

period, he defined 'democracy as a form and a method of governance, under which revolutionary changes in economic and social life of the people are brought about, without bloodshed'

Ambedkar's passion for democracy was very closely related to his commitment to rationality and scientific approach. At a clear level, understanding is necessary for the democratic government since public debate (an essential aspect of democratic practice) is impossible in the absence of common knowledge, logical reasoning and a common compliance to important investigations. If we, as a state of the people adopt a comprehensive view of democracy, reasonable thinking is more relevant to freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Ambedkar's idea of political democracy:

Ambedkar recommended a democratic rule for India. His democracy was opposed to the one, defined by the privileged social groups, who were adamant on continuing with the caste / caste institutions which continue to regulate the social life of the people. In 1943 Ambedkar argued, "The democratic nature of the government believes in the democratic form of society. The formal outline of democracy is of no value, and if there is no social democracy, then it will be impossible ". He further emphasized, "Politicians have never felt that democracy was not a form of government: it was basically a form of society" . He was very apprehensive about the fate of Dalits in independent India. For this, he could clearly see that most political organizations of his time were preparing for the democratic form of India, without questioning the caste / caste organizations of Indian society. That is why, he was urging a radical social reform movement He could also see that any political organization was not ready to intervene in the internal affairs of society. Referring to the experiences of other societies, he had warned, "As the experience proves, rights are not protected by law but by social and moral discretion of society. If a social conscience is such that it is ready to recognize the rights, then the law will be safe and secure, but the fundamental rights are being opposed by the community; no legislation, no parliament, no judicial term can be guaranteed in the real sense.

The Constituent Assembly, while drafting constitution for an independent India, could not ignore important questions of civil society and citizenship. Therefore the Indian constitution, in its introduction, protects all its citizens' justice, social, economic and political; liberty, of thought, expression, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity.

For Ambedkar, social relations are the key to democracy. He was a social democrat in spirit and behaviour. His special contribution in political thought is to add the concept of social democracy to freedom, equality and fraternity. Addressing the Constituent Assembly, he clearly explained, 'Political democracy cannot be up to the mark unless

the basis of it is contained in social democracy, which means that fraternity is a way of life in the form of freedom, equality and principles of life. In this sense, the democracy is defined as a form and method of governance where revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of people are brought without bloodshed”.

Ambedkar’s views on women rights:

Throughout his career, Ambedkar championed the cause of Indian women and the miserable plight of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. He discussed many problems of women and demanded their solution on various platforms and in different capacities. When he was sworn in as the nominated member of the Bombay Legislative Council on February 18, 1927, he strongly supported the maternity bill. His argument was: "It is in the interest of the country that the mother should get certain comfort during and after the prenatal period, and the essence of the bill is entirely based on that principle. Being so Sir, I am obliged to accept that the burden of government should be raised on a large scale, I am ready to accept this fact because the welfare of people is the primary concern of the government and in every country, you will find that the government has followed a certain amount in respect of maternity benefits. "

In the Mahad Satyagraha for the entrance of the temple in 1927, even women took part. Shandabai Shinde was one such woman participant in Satyagraha. It was decided that Manusmriti should be burnt, which humiliated women and more than fifty women participated in the demonstration, after burning the Manusmriti.

In the women's conference of All India Depressed Classes organized in Nagpur on July 20, 1940, Ambedkar insisted that there was no progress without women. He said, "I am a great believer in women's organization. If they want to improve the prevailing conditions in Indian society, they should educate their children and create high ambitions in them.”

When Ambedkar returned to India, after joining the Round Table Conference in London in 1932, Indian women had become ready to be members of various committees. Since Ambedkar was well convinced about the condition of women, he, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian constitution, included political vocabulary for rights of women in the Constitution of India. Therefore, there are articles such as 15 (3), 51 (A), and so on. His main work in the preparation of the Indian Constitution made it a new charter of human rights. He saw law as a means of making a social order in which the development of a person should be in line with the development of society.

In the view of Ambedkar, all citizens must be equal before law; their citizenship rights are equal, equal access to all institutions, utilities and facilities or the public; they have equal opportunities to hold any public office or any business. He demanded

special privileges and protective measures for the Dalits. When the Hindu Code Bill, was being debated in Parliament, Ambedkar showed strong opposition against the standard of equality, independence and fraternity as prevailing in the Indian society and tried to make a case for such a legal framework, in which women are kept at par with their male counterparts in terms of property rights and issues of succession. However, he had to face the opposition of orthodox Hindus. In fact, this bill was a threat to patriarchy on which the structure of the traditional Hindu family was based and it was the main reason behind this opposition. Therefore, the bill was annulled by saying that the dispute is very deep. Ambedkar resigned from the post of law minister. Explaining the cause behind his resignation, he said that the Parliament of Independent India also deprived citizens of their basic rights

His views on communism:

Ambedkar's assessment of socialism was complex and investigative. The formation of the Independent Labor Party in 1936 was a strategic move on his part, to use the term, 'labor' in place of the term, 'Dalit classes' or 'Scheduled Caste'. ILP, however, remained non-Marxist in its rhetoric, while supporting the causes of the working class; although in a speech given in January 1938, Ambedkar said, "In fact, there are only two castes in the world - first of the rich and the other of the poor. I think communist philosophy is close to us".

In November 1949, while presenting the final draft of the Constitution, Ambedkar said that since the Constitution guarantees the possibility of constitutional methods, "bloody methods of revolution" should be abandoned once and for all. In the same speech, he strongly opposed the methods of non-cooperation, civil disobedience and Satyagraha. It is often argued that Ambedkar, during this phase and later Dalit conflicts, in order to be even more pacifist than Gandhi, rarely came to the informal mode of protest, with the notable exception of the Dalit Panthers.

For the first general election of 1951-52, Ambedkar's manifesto advocated land reforms. But the Scheduled Caste Federation, formed by him, got only 2.38% vote share and two seats in the lower house. Ambedkar himself lost elections to the Bombay (North Central) parliamentary constituency by fourteen thousand votes. After this disappointing performance Ambedkar realized the importance of making a political alliance. It was the Praja Socialist Party that, Ambedkar first started the dialogue with. The fruitfulness of this alliance got proved in the bye-election of 1954, in which Ambedkar contested from Bhandari, Maharashtra, along with socialist leader Ashok Mehta. Ambedkar had contested for the reserved seat while Mehta was elected for the non-reserved one. During this time Ambedkar was working on the formation of the Republican Party of India, in consultation with various socialist leaders. RPI was formally established after his demise.

His thoughts on secular- socialist India:

Ambedkar was a liberator for millions of marginalized all over the world. The liberation comes through his core belief in the principle of state socialism which he was instrumental in placing in the preamble of the constitution of India and most importantly through the 'Directive Principles of State Policies' as a 'direction' to the state. Ambedkar's quest for equality with dignity remained till his death but the most important part of his mission was fraternity as he felt equality without fraternity was not acceptable to him and in his numerous articles Ambedkar mentioned as why despite his respect for Russian Revolution, he appreciated French Revolution more, as Russian revolution brought equality but not fraternity but French Revolution brought fraternity too. We cannot ignore the important aspect of social justice, freedom and liberty from Ambedkar's warning when he presented the first copy of the constitution of newly independent India to the chairperson of the Constituent Assembly Dr Rajendra Prasad. He said,'

“On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality.

In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value.

In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value.

How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions?

How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?

If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy, which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.’”

We are iniquitous society and it was important therefore that the modern constitution of India succeed. It was a huge responsibility of the Indian state to bring equality and social justice to all. The motive of Zamindari Abolition Act was to democratize land relations, which dominate our socio-political system. Ambedkar, in fact, wanted radical land reforms in the form of 'nationalization' of land. The root cause of social injustice had been private property. Ambedkar wanted the government to strengthen public sector and initiate welfare measures, as he knew the vast majority of marginalized sections of Indian society would never be able to progress, without state's intervention.

His views on Pakistan:

Ambedkar's book on Pakistan, namely Pakistan, or, The Partition of India is a work of great scholarship. But in order to understand Ambedkar's views on Muslims and on Pakistan, one has to read the book in totality.

The above-mentioned book has five parts. The first part is, "Muslim case for Pakistan". Second part is, "Hindu case for Pakistan". The third part is titled, "What If Not Pakistan". The penultimate part deals with "Pakistan and the Malaise" and the last one deals with issues like, "Must There be Pakistan", "The Problem of Pakistan" and "Who can decide?"

It can thus be seen that if one quotes Ambedkar say from the first part, in which he presents Muslim point of view on Pakistan, one can conclude, that Ambedkar totally favoured creation of Pakistan and if one quotes him from the second part i.e. "Hindu Case Against Pakistan" one can easily conclude, that Ambedkar was against the Muslims.

It is interesting to note here that Ambedkar maintains in the third part, chapter VII, "Strange as it may appear Mr. Savarkar and Mr. Jinnah instead of being opposed to each other on the one nation versus two nations issue are in complete agreement about it. Both agree, not only agree but insist that there are two nations in India - one the Muslim nation and the other the Hindu nation." He further says, "They differ only as regards the terms and conditions on which the two nations should be. Jinnah says India should be cut up into two, Pakistan and Hindustan, the Muslim nation to occupy Pakistan and the Hindu nation to occupy Hindustan. Mr. Savarkar on the other hand insists that, although there are two nations in India, India shall not be divided into two parts, one for the Muslims and the other for Hindus; that the two nations shall dwell in one country and shall live under the mantle of one single constitution: that the constitution shall be such that the Hindu nation will be enabled to occupy a predominant position that is due to it and the Muslim nation to made to live in the position of subordinate co-operation with the Hindu nation."

Thus it can be seen, that Ambedkar is so fair and objective in his approach that he feels that one should not describe all invasions of India by Muslims as invasions against infidels or against India only. He says, "These invasions of India by Muslims were as much invasions of India as they were wars among Muslims themselves. This fact has remained hidden, because the invaders are all lumped together as Muslims without distinction. But as a matter of fact, they were Tartars, Afghans and Mongols. Muhammad (Mahmud?) of Ghazni was a Tartar, Mahommed of Ghor was an Afghan, Taimur was a Mongol, and Babar was Tartar, while Nadirshah and Ahmadshah Abadali were Afghans."

Ambedkar did not support the Gandhian position that let the British quit India and then Indians would settle the matter amongst them and would sort out communal

issue. To quote him, "The British cannot consent to settle power upon an aggressive Hindu majority and make it its heir, leaving it to deal with the minorities at its sweet pleasure. That would not be ending imperialism. It would be creating imperialism. The Hindus, therefore, cannot avoid coming to grips with Pakistan, much as they would like to do."

Ambedkar, therefore is quite categorical in his assertion that before the British leave India, the communal or minority question must be properly settled. He feels that the minorities cannot be left to the mercy of "aggressive majority" as he puts it. Ambedkar has thoroughly examined the Muslim (or rather Muslim League) point of view in the first part of his book "Muslim Case for Pakistan". Explaining Muslim League's view he says, "Is it or is it not a fact that Muslims of India are an exclusive group? Is it or is it not a fact that they have consciousness of kind? Is it or is it not a fact that every Muslim is possessed by a longing to his own group and not to any non-Muslim group?"

He further says, "if the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, then the controversy must end and the Muslim claim that they are a nation must be accepted without cavil."

Here Ambedkar is putting forth the Muslim League's viewpoint and not his own, as is understood to be by some scholars.

Ambedkar had his own view of Muslims and Pakistan. He was totally opposed to the concept of Hindu Raj as well. In the part "Must There Be Pakistan" he says, "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to the liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost."

But he was against partition of India. He says, "How have the French, the English, and the Italians succeeded in preventing the Raj of the majority community being established in their country? Surely, not by partition: What is their method? Their method is to put a ban on communal parties in politics. No community in Canada, South Africa or Switzerland ever thinks of starting a separate communal party."

He goes on to say, "What is important to note is that it is the minority nations, which have taken the lead in opposing the formation of a communal party. For they know that if they form a communal party the major community will also form a communal party and the majority community will thereby find it easy to establish communal Raj. It is vicious method of self-protection."

Thus it is evident that Ambedkar was certainly neither anti-Muslim nor in favour of Pakistan. He wanted a just solution to the minority problem in India. To quote him from page number 359 of the book in question, "Is it not a fact that under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in most provinces, if not in all, the Muslims, the non-

Brahmins and Depressed Classes united together and worked the reforms as members of one team from 1920 to 1937? Herein lay the most fruitful method of achieving communal harmony among Hindus and Muslims and of destroying the danger of Hindu Raj. Mr. Jinnah could have easily pursued this line. Nor was it difficult for Mr. Jinnah to succeed in it."

Ambedkar furthers his argument by saying, "Mr. Jinnah is the one person who has all the chances of success on his side if he had tried to form such a united no-communal party. He has ability to organize. He had the reputation of a nationalist."

Thus after a careful study of Ambedkar on the question of Pakistan, it may be safely concluded that he was far from being anti-Muslim. He was very balanced and just in his approach towards Muslim question and suggested a very constructive solution to it. In order to understand Ambedkar's attitude towards the communal question in pre-independence India, one must read the full text of the book.

Conclusion:

It has been proved beyond doubt that, Ambedkar's was a versatile personality. He did work hard, not only for the upliftment of downtrodden masses of Indian society, but he also contributed immensely toward the Indian women's cause. He expressed his views freely on issues like, social and political democracy, communism, partition of India, Indian economy etc. He has been considered a liberator of the Indian women. He was a great scholar of law. He was very bold and straightforward in expressing himself about Hindu religion, about which he once said that it was beyond his control to be born in a Hindu family; but he will not die a Hindu. It was due to this that he, along with lacs of his followers, converted to Buddhism. Therefore, keeping in mind all these facts; it would not be justifiable on our part, to limit an all-round personality, like Ambedkar only to the cause of dalits.

Keywords:

1. Untouchability and caste restrictions
2. Dalit conflicts
3. Indian women
4. Political democracy

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