

AMBEDKAR'S CASTE IDEOLOGY IN HIS WRITINGS AND SPEECHES

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As an intellectual, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar belongs to the category of analysts who enter into the socio-cultural set ups with a vision that is more prophetic in nature. Philosophers and thinkers in each era, raise questions and most of the times they come with solutions for developing a new understanding towards already existing institutions. These solutions are also reformative ideas that are based on strong philosophical arguments. Usually, their visions are not self-born but are developed through certain arguments and ideas that have influenced their visions in the early stages of their own understanding of the existing institutions and development sectors. The analysis here is to understand the argument that Ambedkar gave to the challenge the orthodox systems and also suggested a new world that can be re-established on the strong innovative and rational ideas and values.

Reading Ambedkar's ideology can be commenced with the basic values he discussed in the beginning of his writings. Most importantly, his own values were based on his own understanding on the basis of his personal experiences. He discussed these in almost all his writings and at the same time presented his research to support that. Meera Nanda, in her writings has discussed Ambedkar as a prophet. She considers that the rationality expressed in the vision of Ambedkar was influenced by his teacher John Dewey, who was bringing in the Western idea of science being the most important connection that can give base to any cultural and social set up. She asserts that the teachings of the Western world of promoting science, was embraced by the victims and oppressed who were unable to fight against the mystic social system that discriminated with them and did not allow them to participate in many cultural and religious traditions which allow them to be part of these events in the natural set up.

Caste system in India was a hierarchical structure. In this order based on the division of occupation of people, there were castes who were above the other castes and they were bestowed with many powers, religiously and culturally. The castes which were at the lowest level of this hierarchical set up, were always discriminated through many practices like untouchability and allowed them to enforce their own dominance over these lower castes. Now this victimisation and oppression was a very important reason for the oppressed to welcome the modern approach through nature that will bring a level of equal opportunity for them in this discriminatory social caste structure.

These set ups were based on rituals and traditions that were made to divide people on the basis of caste boundaries. The practices and traditions that created the class and caste based divisions in the society, managed to hold on the beliefs that did not allow merging of castes and kept the lowest caste at the lowest level of the hierarchy. It was essential for the oppressed castes to raise their voice against such systems to abolish practices of inequality. For Dalit intellectuals, it was important to create a just society for bringing equality in the social set up. Ambedkar suggested a society that should be free from the orders that discriminate between individuals from the same species. According to him, science is modern, and modern is all about being progressive in all the social and cultural sections. He reasoned the essence of natural science to bring people close to the natural resources and understand science to be a branch that merged the boundaries between nature and science.

Ambedkar during his stay in America, where he completed his graduation at Columbia University in 1916. He was influenced strongly by the teachings of John Dewey, a Professor of philosophy at Columbia University.

'What is more, Ambedkar followed Dewey in believing that the *content* of modern scientific theories demanded rational acceptance by *all* people, universally, because these theories are the products of the most systematic practice of the scientific attitude. He believed that with modern science, a new kind of knowledge was born that could replace the supernatural, metaphysical knowledge accessible only to the pure and the wise, with the fallible, testable experience of reality available to all.' (Nanda 5)

It was clear through these readings that Ambedkar with his influence from the ideas of Dewey was aware that the caste system and its hierarchy cannot be changed to a new system without bringing in the approach that the social system needs to go back to the beginning and must have the moral values based on natural science where equality and fraternity should be the key values. This was not possible without starting an enquiry on the dogmas and the system of oppression in Indian society.

What was more influential for Ambedkar from the teachings of Dewey was not to completely remove a belief of religion, instead a new approach should be developed where the teachings should not come only from religious texts, instead it should be taught through the internal development to understand and connect with the modern natural science, that is What was more influential for Ambedkar from the teachings of Dewey was not to completely remove a belief of religion,

instead a new approach should be developed where the teachings should not come only from religious texts, instead it should be taught through the internal development to understand and connect with the modern natural science, that is based on reality and not the mystic preachings but the transformation of values into new reconstructed values. These ethics were carried on by Ambedkar and he found the answer in neo-Buddhism that allowed the change to come from within instead of from outside preaching.

Ambedkar as a visionary was not only challenging the old system based on division and discrimination but was also making a space for the new scientific system. He gave a moral and natural science system for a society that can go beyond the old caste-based system and move into a modern socio-cultural set up. Valerian discusses Ambedkar's 'three-stage historiography', where emphasis was more on reasoning, understanding and evaluation through science and technology and modern institution that keeps man free but allows interaction of man with nature around it. It was important for him to lay more emphasis on modern because modern will create more freedom for all.

Ambedkar emphasised more on human and moral values. For him, society should treat everyone equally and give equal opportunities to all. He wanted a society that should be set up around the social enquiry based on moral evaluation. As discussed by Valerian,

'The foundations of morality lie in justice and justice in turn involves upholding the liberty and equality of the human person and extending to him the bond of the community.' (18)

Ambedkar believed in the right moral values given in the right way to make a society understand their cultural strength beyond their superstitions and discriminatory traditions. His emphasis was to create a different valued understanding towards religion. He believed in a secular approach in building and believing in religion. He did not deny the existence of religion which was already there but he wished for a religion which can understand the human values and treat all religions equally. Secularism in many ways was what he wanted to bring in to create a religion which was open and modern and believes in science and morality make universal religion which will allow many layers of equality.

Ambedkar argued that it was not fair then to carry on with the myths and superstitions and to apply traditions based on mysticism. It was important to rationalize discourses. He insisted on re looking on the traditions and customs that were explained theologically but were not rationalized in their implementation. Ambedkar's ideology of reasoning explains, 'The world and man, he argued, can be explained by human reason and endeavour. You do not need to invoke the supernatural is the product of weak human capacities or underdeveloped state of affairs. This radical secularity went along with his assertion of the autonomy of man.' (Rodrigues 39)

Ambedkar insisted in bringing in equal living conditions within freedom, equality and fraternity. He insisted that these are going to be foundation that can build a just society. These foundations can create a moral and religious reasoning that can give access of liberty and equality to all. Ambedkar believed in bringing in more opportunities and preferential treatment to the deprived and oppressed to create equality in the social resources and opportunities. Though he believed that social skills and capacities can be treated as individual achievements but then these skills need to be trained for economic and social upliftment. He believed in the exclusive and diverse identities, but at the same time he considers nationalism above all.

Rodrigues, describes Ambedkar's nationalism, 'as a wild outpouring of energy that needs to be tamed by a regime of rights buttressed by the rule of law.' Ambedkar treated liberal democracy as the development of pluralism in the societies but he also insisted on bringing in major opportunities for the minorities.

Ambedkar always considered importance of laws in creating a just society, he believed that the hierarchical order in the Indian caste society cannot be separated from the inhuman practices like 'untouchability' as it keeps different castes into different categories. Ambedkar insisted that the social groups are divided on the basis of their occupation worldwide. There are potters there are washermen, people who clean places, cobblers and different occupations which may not be considered exclusive and unique but in these groups people can move in and move out on the basis of change of their occupations. Ambedkar talks about the significance of naming of castes. Rodrigues explains that Ambedkar categorizes the social groups as the groups which are based on certain regulations duties and privileges assigned to them. The memberships to these social groups are open. Whereas, there are groups which are voluntarily joined by people where social regulations and traditions may not be applicable. He considers that 'cast is a highly organized social grouping.' He further discusses that these casts are not left loose one cannot enter and exit voluntarily out of these social cast groups.

Ambedkar argues that naming these casts has made these casts fixed where the guidelines and traditions are to be followed from birth to the death of the individual. He says that naming the casts defines the position of the people who are born in this cast in the social structures. He also defines that the cast is redefined with a surname used in it. In the beginning if these cast names and surnames were made or were constructed for the individual identities or identity of the community then there should have been an intersection of the castes which could have allowed people to shift from one profession of identity to another profession of identity. Ambedkar argues to open the intersections through inter-dinning and inter-caste marriages he was providing solutions to remove practices like Untouchability for the eradication of this practice Ambedkar carried on with the anti-untouchability agenda, he was a member of the Central Board of the League. He also was involved in removing untouchability by sending written petitions to various organisations.

Ambedkar planned organized movements. His vision was to create an awakening in the depressed classes to raise their voice for their rights which were denied to them for centuries. Various small and big conferences that he organised in different places in Maharashtra was to bring the oppressed castes together under one roof and make them aware of the

atrocities that was inflicted on them. For these oppressed castes, it was part of their destiny and they were born into these castes because of their sins of their last birth. Ambedkar in almost all his speeches, talks about his strong recommendation that the depressed castes should come out of their closed spaces and start moving into the spaces which were banned for them for years. In the Mahad conference, he saw to it that people from Mahar caste should be taking water from the Chowdar Tank which was exclusively used by the upper castes. It was a big challenge and Ambedkar saw a lot of protest from upper castes against this move. The significant move was to bring the untouchables into the world of 'purity' through many restrictions and allow them to have access to the basic public facilities like water, house and food. Ambedkar also saw to it that in these conferences more people should join and thousands of them attended the conference. He insisted that education should be made accessible to all and evil practices like untouchability should be stopped completely. In these conferences, inter dining was also part of their agitation, where people from upper castes would eat with the lower castes. These actions were strong steps towards equality and were meant to open the spaces where some planning can be done to have a society based on fraternity and equality.

In almost all his speeches, Ambedkar, asked upper castes to stop treating Untouchables in the inhuman way and also asked them to allow Untouchable children to get access to free education at the primary level and let them stay in the hostels and find ways to earn money. He also at the same time insisted that Untouchables should make efforts to move into the areas which are cleaner, keep their localities clean and at the same time they should wear clean clothes and dress properly. Most importantly he emphasised on the need of methods that will open caste boundaries and pull the Depressed castes to from their closed spaces and get access to all the public facilities. He also made request to the government in his second Mahad conference to create such opportunities for the Untouchables.

Ambedkar believed that women should be treated equal to men. In his speeches he also included various guidelines for women of the Depressed castes. He insisted that women are a very strong pillar in the household, their deprived state brings further fall in the condition of the Untouchables. They can change the state of living by maintaining themselves and the living conditions around them. They nurture their children and can easily teach good moral values and ethics to the children so that they can grow to be better citizens.

In a reference to the Dhananjay Keer in *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Eleanor Zelliott quotes one of the speeches of Ambedkar,

'Never regard yourselves as Untouchables. Live a clean life. Dress yourself like the touchable ladies.... Attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self help....Do not feed your spouse and sons if they are drunkards. Send your children to schools. Education is as necessary for a female as it is for males. If you know how to read and write, there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be. Mould their lives in a virtuous way.' (Zelliott 82)

It was basically a two-way movement that is visible in the prophetic vision of Ambedkar. His speeches were strong elocutions meant to provoke Untouchables to rise and bring changes in their lives.

Ambedkar was working towards making a just society and for that he used all methods. Other than conferences and speeches, he also worked on the newspapers that could create a movement with the articles relevant for provoking upper castes and Untouchables to move towards making a society equal for all. Zelliott mentions his efforts of publishing the ideas that he wanted to bring to the public, he published *Mooknayak* (1920), *Bahishkrit Bharat* (1927) and *Janta* (1929) *Prabuddha Bharat* (1955). In almost all these papers, he attacked the orthodox system and values which were made to discriminate against Untouchables and to bring the awareness in the Untouchables to join those movements and methods that can bring them out from their very sad living conditions. Ambedkar was aware of the reality and knew that more and more of awareness and education was the only method to carry on with the making of a new society. He very significantly kept the economic improvement for the later stage but wanted them to get social equality and education at the first place. Referring to A. B. Keith's *A Constitutional History of India, 1600-1935*, Zelliott refers to the political battle that was fought by Ambedkar. He wanted representation in the political platform for the Depressed classes and he also wanted to create their leaders, who can raise voice for the deprived sections. Zelliott refers to the reforms that were given to the Mahars by the Minto-Morley reforms in 1909 that granted a few 'new privileges' to them. By including them into jobs and army. After this the next reform she refers to was in the Montagu-Chelmsford period where more administrative opportunities were given to Indians and it was a chance for getting jobs in these offices through the best possible opportunities. After these reforms, Zelliott mentions the main effort that was made by Ambedkar was in the Southborough Commission representation where he wanted that the separate representation of the Untouchables in the political leadership. He was not creating a separate social caste or section of the society, in fact he impressed upon the situation where, experiences of the Untouchables cannot be same as the experiences of the Touchables. He insisted on making the opportunity by giving separate number of Untouchable leaders to represent and work on the pathetic condition of the Untouchables. These were significant reformative proposals which were not accepted easily.

Ambedkar drafted many documents and one of the main documents that he worked on was setting up of a democratic structure which will follow certain constitutional laws. The Indian constitution that he worked on was made by the drafting committee that submitted Draft Constitution containing 315 Articles and 8 Schedules. (Rodrigues, pg.473)

The Constitution was based on the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The two principles that were taken care of in the Draft Constitution were Unitary and the other was Federal. The Constitutional Morality was to create a secular and civilized brotherhood for the development of the democratic setup of nation. As much as importance was given to the rights equal importance was given to Equality and Liberty. Ambedkar was aware of the division of people on the basis of gender he insisted that women and their empowerment should be given requisite space in the Constitutional Draft.

Ambedkar's ideology was to uplift the Depressed castes to the level where they were given ample opportunities to reach the social conditions where they were able to be part of the civilized society and contribute towards their own development.

His progressive and modern approach towards the re-shaping of Indian socio-cultural set up was to completely remove the old caste system and construct a society that will be based on equal treatment of all and equal opportunities for the development of all. His progressive scientific approach was prophetic and his vision included his affirmative and reformative methods that influenced life of all the oppressed sections, addressing caste and gender both.

References-

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