

THE RELEVANCE OF AMBEDKARISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

SHAMBHU LAL SALVI

Department of Political Science, Mohanlal Sukhadia University

Abstract

Ambedkarism is today a living force in India. The extent of social transformation of any socially discriminated people may be better judged from the social philosophies propounded by their great leaders like Dr. Ambedkar in modern India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a multifaceted personality, a philosopher, a politician, a social reformer, a historian and an economist. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the chief architect of Indian Constitution. The present research paper analyses the Ambedkarism and its relevance to achieving social justice, liberty, equality and fraternity through constitutional provisions in the 21st century in the Indian context.

This paper also evaluates the role of Dr. Ambedkar in relation to his significant contribution towards Dalits, society, as an architect of Indian Constitution, as a feminist, as an economist, as a writer and his place in Indian history. In conclusion, we can say that Ambedkarism has still relevant in India to achieve social justice, removal of untouchability and to establish equality, liberty, and fraternity.

The research paper is purely based on secondary sources.

Ambedkarism is today a living force in India. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (April 1891-December 1956), affectionately also known as Babasaheb, was one of the most illustrious sons of India. Babasaheb was a multifaceted personality, a philosopher, a politician, a social reformer, a jurist, a historian and an economist, a champion of Dalits, an eminent lawyer, and a feminist. Babasaheb was first law minister of independent India and he was the principal architect of Constitution of India. He inspired the Modernist Buddhist Movement in India which is popularly known as Dalit Buddhist Movement. He appeared on the Indian socio-political scene in the early 1920s and remained in the forefront of all social, economic, political and religious efforts for the upliftment of the lowest stratum of the Indian

Keywords:

B.R. Ambedkar
Constitution
India
Equality
Reformer

society known as ‘untouchables’. Babasaheb organized, united and inspired the Dalits in India to effectively use political means towards their goal of social equality.¹ Babasaheb was highly educated personality- Ph.D. from Columbia University (1917), D.Sc. from London School of Economics and Bar -At-Law from Gray’s Inn in London (1923).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is an institution. He is a hope for millions who have been denied their rights. Ambedkar was not a writer or philosopher but a popular leader of the huge segment in India so many of his decisions are political in nature taken at that point in time. Dr. Ambedkar was an iconoclast because he never believed in icons. His hero was Voltaire whose famous quote he always used, ‘I may disagree with you but I will defend your right to express’. He always mentioned that India needed a Voltaire, a dissenter who can speak without keeping things in the heart. Those who want to make us believe that Ambedkar only had a constitution book in his hand actually leave aside his historical role in the mass struggle for the rights of the people. Ambedkar stood for all those who were oppressed by religious dogmas. He was the chief architect of Indian Constitution based on values of democracy, liberty, equality, and secularism. He challenged the state and provided the state a new alternative. He himself said that good constitutions too can be failed by bad people. He further said that if this constitution fails to protect people, he would be the first to burn it.² He was posthumously awarded India’s highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna in 1990 for his significant contribution as the ‘*Architect of Modern India*’.

Basic Philosophy

It is very difficult to define ‘Basic Philosophy’ of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as his ideas belong more to the category of an ‘Ideology’ or ‘Ambedkarism’ than a philosophy. (K.S.Chalam: *Relevance of Ambedkarism in India*) He was not a philosopher in the generally accepted sense. He upheld that “Every man should have a philosophy of life, for everyone must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. And philosophy is nothing but a standard by which to measure.” (D. Keer: *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*) He did not consider himself to be a philosopher, but a social reformer. (D.R. Jatav: *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar*) Ambedkar’s philosophy mainly consists in acceptance or rejection of certain principles, dogmas or doctrines.³

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, “My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words- liberty, equality, and fraternity. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.”

Methodology

The present research paper is based on historical method. The research paper is purely based on the

secondary sources that are available from the reference books, journals article, and online resources.

Ambedkar as a Social Reformer

The extent of social transformation of any socially discriminated people may be better judged from the social philosophies propounded by their great leaders like Ambedkar in modern India. Baba Saheb Ambedkar inherited a society based on the graded inequality and injustice resulting in the deprivation of human rights of millions of his countrymen. He felt the need for reforming and restructuring the Hindu society based on equality, liberty, and justice. Centuries-old customs, traditions, and beliefs cannot be thrown away overnight. To mold the Indian society which comprised several religions, faiths, linguistic and ethnic groups and subcultures, into one compact unit was by any standard a herculean task.⁴

As a social reformer, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stressed on a much broader nation of stable reconstruction of India with inclusive growth and cultural integration in the nation without caste discrimination. The sufferings, exploitation, and oppression of the Scheduled Castes will not end unless the Caste system is destroyed. It is a fact that Ambedkar did not propound any specific theory of social justice per se. Dr. Ambedkar embodied these principles enshrined in the theory of social justice propounded by Plato and Rawls. Though the economic problems were political in nature, they were basically social.⁵ As the major architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar provides safeguard for untouchability under Article 17 of Indian Constitution for establishing an equitable society to millions of oppressed and depressed classes. The discrimination based on the caste still exists in the Indian society. There are still needs for further improvement to change the attitude of the society. The significant role that Ambedkar played in the upliftment of the untouchables in the early 20th century and the importance that he gives to modern education for their betterment deserves special emphasis. In many conferences, lecture and meetings, Dr. Ambedkar encouraged untouchable youth to acquire higher education to raise their social status and image. Dr. Ambedkar established Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha in 1924, which had among its objectives the opening of hostels, libraries, social centers, and classrooms where youth could study.⁶ Ambedkar ideas for the Scheduled Castes was 'to raise their educational standards so that they may know their own conditions, have aspirations rise to the level of highest Hindu and be in a position to use political power as a means to that end' (Zelliot 1972.77).

Ambedkar's ideas for social development are based on self-respect, equality, self-help, liberty, and fraternity. Ambedkar said that untouchability is cancer, which was spread in the previous society. Ambedkar tried to emancipate the depressed classes in five ways- (1) by exposing the evils of caste system; (2) reform in the Hindu society; (3) by attempting to get minority status through separate electorate; (4) by getting reservation for the Scheduled Castes; (5) by conversion to Buddhism.⁷

Dr. Ambedkar tried to reform the Hindu society and fought against the evils of Hinduism-

untouchability, exploitation, oppression and inhuman treatment. He fully exposed the caste system and its evil in the book '*Annihilation of Caste*' and also put forward to reform it. Dr. Ambedkar believed in peaceful methods of social change. He was supported to constitutional lines in the evolutionary process of social transformation. He thought the factors like law and order which are indispensable for social life. A welfare state of all cannot be developed on the grounds of terror, force and brutal methods. According to him violent methods to a peaceful society is not only improper but also unscientific and immoral.⁸

According to Raja Sekhar Vundru who calls, Dr. Ambedkar as the other father (Father of Indian Constitution) rightly said: "Dr. Ambedkar gave millions of untouchables an identity of their own. He is now regarded as a great Indian, a person relevant for all times to come. He dedicated his life to the uplifting of Dalits".⁹ **Dr. Ambedkar said, "You can change your lot, but do not flock to temples hoping for justice to come to you in heaven. There is justice to be found on earth if you can fight for it. This idea gave them a new courage and a sense of self-respect that they had never known before"**.

Ambedkar's role in framing Indian Constitution

Ambedkar's most significant contribution has undoubtedly been the chief architect of Indian constitution based on values of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, and secularism. Ambedkar has also contributed to bringing independent India onto the path of modern India. It is indeed a tribute to his sagacity, wisdom and legal acumen that the basic philosophy and ideals enshrined in the Constitution of India. Have withstood the test of time and helped in preserving the unity, integrity and democratic fabric of the country. Therefore, he has been aptly described as the Modern Manu.¹⁰ For drafting of the Indian Constitution on 29th August 1947 passing one resolution, the Constituent Assembly appointed a 'Drafting Committee' with the seven members including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as Chairman.

Dr. Ambedkar had imprinted his mark of talent and vision in drafting Indian Constitution. His statesman qualities can easily visible on each and every article of Indian Constitution. Ambedkar preferred the parliamentary system of England rather than the Presidential System in America. He strongly supported the federal system. The draft constitution can be both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances. In normal times, it is framed to work as a federal system. But in times of war, it is so designed as to make it work as though it was a unitary system. Dr. Ambedkar clarified the criticisms of The Directive Principles of state policy as "whoever captures power will not be free to do what he likes with it. In the exercise of it, he will have to respect these instruments of instructions which are called Directive Principles. He cannot ignore them. He may not have to answer for their breach in a court of Law. But he will certainly have to answer for them

before the electorate at election time”. Dr. Ambedkar stated about Article 32 that “It I was asked to name any particular article in this as the most important an article without which the constitution would be a nullity I would not refer to any other article except this one. It is the very soul of the constitution and heart of it”. **He remarked about the constitution as “It is workable, it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peacetime and in wartime. Indeed, if I may so if things go wrong under the new constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad constitution what we will have to say is that man is vile”.**¹¹

Ambedkar ideas on Women Empowerment

As the law minister, Dr. Ambedkar was the chief architect of the Hindu Code Bill which was introduced in the Constituent Assembly. It established the equality of men and women in all legal matters, ensured property rights and right to adoption to women, right to divorce, provided for the equal inheritance for men and women and put an end to a variety of marriage systems prevailing in India and legalized only monogamous marriages. When he was faced with strong opposition from the orthodoxy, he brilliantly argued that he is proposing no additional rights which were not already enjoyed by the Hindu women in the past. But orthodoxy succeeds in stalling the bill and Dr. Ambedkar chose to resign from the post of the law minister rather than diluting the rights of women as proposed in the bill.¹²

Dr. Ambedkar also advocated education of women. According to him, there is no contrast between man and woman. Educated women should join social work to educate, organize and unite all women to make conscious of their rights and privileges. Women education is a great requirement of our society. She can change their home with neat and clean work and she also encourages her children for education.¹³

Ambedkar as an Economist

Dr. Ambedkar’s Ph.D. thesis was inspired to establish the Finance Commission of India and his contribution helped a lot in framing guidelines for the RBI Act, 1934. Ambedkar studied economic issues like agrarian reforms, small holdings and agricultural productivity problems regarding Indian currency, the problem of provincial finance and planning. He contributed immensely to Financial Economics, Economics of Socialism and Agricultural Economics. His economic ideas are still relevant. Dr. Ambedkar’s commitment was internal stability and he was convinced that only an automatic system based on the gold standard with gold currency could achieve this desirable end. He also stresses the need for industrialization so as to move surplus labor from agriculture to other productive occupations.¹⁴ He played a significant role in the establishment of the National Power Grid System, Central Water Irrigation, Navigation Commission, Damodar Valley Project, Hirakund Project and Sone River Project. Thus Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas on public finance and agriculture have vital relevance and still applicable in

a current situation of India.

Ambedkar as a renowned Writer

Dr. Ambedkar as a writer wrote many books on different disciplines are still relevant to solve Social, economic and political problems of India. Some of his major writings are as follows: (1) Essay on Untouchables and Untouchability : Social, (2) Small Holdings in India and their Remedies, (3) Buddha and Karl Marx, (4) Manu and the Shudras, (5) Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto, (6) Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah, (7) Statement of Evidence to Royal Commission on Indian Currency, (8) Who were Shudras ?, (9) Buddha and his Dharma, (10) Revolution and Counter Revolution in India, (11) Paramountcy and the Claim of the Indian States to be independent, (12) The Evolution of Provincial finance in British India : A Study in the Provincial, (13) History of Indian currency and banking, (14) The Untouchables : who were they and why became untouchable?, (16) Federation versus Freedom, (17) Philosophy of Hinduism, (18) Notes on Acts and Laws, (19) Ancient Indian Commerce, (20) Caste in India : their mechanism, genesis and development, (21) Annihilation of Caste, (22) Preservation of social order, (23) India on the Eve of Crown Government, (24) The Constitution of British India, (25) Pakistan or the Partition of India, (26) Need for check and balances ³/₄ article on linguistic state, (27) Maharashtra as linguistic provision, (28) Riddles of Hinduism, (29) Lectures on English Constitution, (30) Communal deadlock and a way to solve it... etc. His works are testimony enough of the vastness and depth of his studies, wisdom and the free-feeling thought and greatness of his qualities which are eloquently refulgent in his works.¹⁵

Ambedkar's place in Indian History

Dr. Ambedkar, 'a symbol of revolt' as mentioned by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's First Prime Minister, was one of the front-ranking nation-builders of India. Ambedkar is a socio-political reformer, had a deep effect on modern India. A memorial for Ambedkar was established in his Delhi residence at 26, Alipore Road. His birth date is celebrated as a holiday known as Ambedkar Jayanti. His initiatives have influenced various spheres of life and transformed the way India today looks at socio-economic policies, education and affirmative action through socio-economic and legal incentives. Many public educational and other institutions are named in his honor in India.¹⁶

The Relevance of Ambedkar's Thought in the 21st Century

Ambedkarism is of great relevance to Indian society even today in achieving social justice, removal of untouchability, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy. Dr. Ambedkar is a socio-political reformer, had a deep effect on modern India. In post-independence India, his socio-political ideas have acquired great respect across all spheres of the society. Dr. Ambedkar struggled throughout his life, for the rights of the Dalits and other socially backward classes as well as for the women. He

also made a great contribution to economic and agrarian reforms. His life is ideal and inspiration to the people who want to serve the nation.

References

1. Goel Sunita(2014), "The Relevance of Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy for the 21st Century", Recent Educational & Psychological Researches, Vol.3, Jan.-Feb.-March, pp.59-62.
2. <http://www.countercurrents.org/rawat270314.htm>
3. Verma S.L., "Representative Indian Political Thinkers", p.427.
4. Dr. P. Subrmanyachary, "Ambedkarism: An Invisible Management of Problems", Global Research Analysis, Vol.2, Issue 11, Nov. 2013, p. 155.
5. Ibid, p.155.
6. Goel Sunita(2014), "The Relevance of Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy for the 21st Century", Recent Educational & Psychological Researches, Vol.3, Jan.-Feb.-March, pp.59-62.
7. Verma S.L., "Representative Indian Political Thinkers", p.464.
8. <http://vijaysvision.blogspot.in/2016/03/the-role-of-b-r-Ambedkar-in-shaping.html>
9. Vundru Rajasekhar, "The Other Father", Outlook (Weekly), Independence Day Special, 20 August 2012.
10. Agrawal Sudarshan, "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Man and his Message", Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi, p.27.
11. <http://vijaysvision.blogspot.in/2016/03/the-role-of-b-r-Ambedkar-in-shaping.html>
12. Ibid
13. Goel Sunita(2014), "The Relevance of Ambedkar's Educational Philosophy for the 21st Century", Recent Educational & Psychological Researches, Vol.3, Jan.-Feb.-March, pp.59-62.
14. Dr. P. Subrmanyachary, "Ambedkarism: An Invisible Management of Problems", Global Research Analysis, Vol.2, Issue 11, Nov. 2013, p. 155.
15. <http://vijaysvision.blogspot.in/2016/03/the-role-of-b-r-Ambedkar-in-shaping.html>
16. Dr. P. Subrmanyachary, "Ambedkarism: An Invisible Management of Problems", Global Research Analysis, Vol.2, Issue 11, Nov. 2013, p. 156.

Contributor details :

SHAMBHU LAL SALVI

Guest Faculty

Department of Political Science

Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan

E-mail: sisjnu78@gmail.com

