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Dr. Ambedkar on Indian Society and Politics

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“The structure of Indian Society is characterized by an order of ascending reverence and descending contempt”^[1]. It is not only divided into numerous groups but also stratified on the basis of caste and class which are basic impediments. In every walk of progressive life. The class arose in case of Indian, out of the creation of the ‘Varna’ system and later this four-field Varna system was converted into many castes and sub-castes which was the essential functional theory of Vedic-society.

“In the thought of Dr. Ambedkar, Untouchability arose through the breaking up of tribes in ancient wars when a tribes no longer had enough members to be a tribes its remnants were ‘broken men’ and were compelled to live outside the walls of villages and towns, doing unclean works and enduring the insult and torture of the unbroken”^[2].

It is true that during ancient times there were constant wars among various tribes in search of fertile land and maintenance of supremacy. “The defeated or ‘broken men’ were being enslaved in ‘Greece, Rome’ and Central America and in case of India ‘broken men’ were considered untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar considers these ‘broken men’ as a warring race and they are all the offspring of the Kshatriya community”^[3]. However the untouchables in India were forcibly given the professions of scavenging sweeping shoe-making and washing they were reduced to the status of bonded laborers. “They were denied education and the right of possession of land and thus many tyrannies and social oppressions were inflicted on them for centuries”^[4].

It is true many kind-hearted social reformers appeared in Indian society who were moved in the depressed plight of untouchables but no positive solution were given by them. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar born an untouchable appeared in Indian society not as a social reformer but a social revolutionary. The social environment had such an impact on his consciousness that Dr. Ambedkar wanted a total change of Indian society. He demanded the abolition of untouchability not for a community only but also the destruction of the caste system for the Indian society as a whole. It is worth while attempting to briefly analyze his concept on Indian society and his political philosophy.

Dr. Ambedkar’s idea of society is that it is a human organization in which people will live peacefully with the order of social equality and human dignity. For the full development of individuality the society must not be static but dynamic which should create a conducive atmosphere of liberty and brotherhood. Political right and socio-economic equality, according to him are essential for the social development and national integration.

As regards Indian society there is no party between the thought of Dr. Ambedkar and the structure of Indian society. The Chaturvarna system has ruined the peace and happiness as the Hindus neglected to follow its ideology. They forgot the theory of Karma (merit) and everything determined and established on the basis of birth. Before the promulgation of the Indian Constitution the concept of social status was based on birth and not on merit. Religious dogmas and graded inequality was the motto of the Hindu society. “In this context Dr. Ambedkar says that Hindus continue to think of the Brahmin Kshatriya Vaishya and Shudras as hierarchical divisions of high and low based on birth and act accordingly.”⁵ “Political and economic right should be supported and sustained by social equality but in Indian it has been domination by the religious doctrine of the Chaturvarna and caste system”^[6].

Dr. Ambedkar condemned the caste system comparing caste with class: “The caste system is infested with the spirit of isolation and in fact it makes the isolation of one caste from another a matter of virtue. The class system it is true produces groups. But they are not akin to caste groups. It does not make isolation a virtue nor does it prohibit social intercourse”^[7].

Among those who fought against untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar occupies a unique place. He not only studied or observed but he had also direct experience of untouchability in his personal life. From his experience he writes; The system of untouchability was a gold-mine for Hindus. “The

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untouchables were forced to be bonded laborers scavengers and sweepers they were denied education and also prohibited to possess land. Untouchability as an economic system permitted uncontrollable economic exploitation without obligation”^[8]. That is because there was no independent public opinion to condemn it and there was no impartial administrative machinery to restrain it.

Dr. Ambedkar in anguish and with bitter dissatisfaction thus symbolized the revolt against untouchability and depression. “He told the depressed class that they themselves could alone break their bondage through self-help, self-development and self-assertion”^[9]. He published many papers and journals to make them conscious of their slavery and to win support of others for their cause.

Dr. Ambedkar was the follower of the principle of peace and non-violence. One is said to his fellowmen that a violent overthrow of the existing government or social order would result either in dictatorship or in anarchy. He believed in necessary changes aimed at the reconstruction of society peacefully on the basis of the cherished values of liberty equality and fraternity.

Dr. Ambedkar criticized all the social reformers who tried to eradicate untouchability without destroying caste. According to his opinion untouchability is based upon the tenets of the caste system. The two are inextricably associated it is not possible to abolish untouchability without doing away with the caste system. This barrier between one group of people and another has to be broken down. In this principle he was not a utopian but to be realist. He had a strong streak of idealism but it was not warped by unrealistic considerations not for any particular community but against system as a whole.

“Dr. Ambedkar upheld the need for human dignity, equality, liberty, rights and civic facilities for mankind as a whole. He was a believer in women’s progress and children’s care. He advised women to learn to be clean keep away from vices to give education to their children and to remove their inferiority complex”^[10]. In 1925, a struggle was also started by him against the Devadasi system in South India. “He also prohibited child labor below 14 years of age when he was the Labor Member in the Viceroy’s Council”^[11].

The Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 was most important and significant movement in the life of Dr. Ambedkar in course of which he publicly burnt Manusmriti thereby giving vent to his anger and bitterness with the social order and principles laid down by Manu the great Hindu law giver”^[12]. Manu advised the upper caste Hindus to oppress, suppress, exploit and tyrannize over the Shudras and untouchables through his scripture and Dr. Ambedkar condemned this as the main cause for the disorganization and demoralization of Hindu society.

Dr. Ambedkar tried to smash the stigma of traditionalism religious orthodoxy and superstition. He advised the untouchables to enter into schools rather than temples and turned the movement of the removal of untouchability into the channels of conversion to Buddhism”^[13]. He rejected the whole system of the Brahminical religion and the theory of the infallibility of the Vedas, transmigration efficacy of rights, the moksha after the cycle of births and Ishwar as the creator of universe. He rejected the whole upanishadic thought as a mere imagination”^[14].

According to Dr. Ambedkar the caste system narrows down public opinion. It sets up each of the hundreds of indigenous group against other and kills the broad sense of brotherhood. Caste system has made suddhi or re-conversion in Hinduism impossible because the caste system has no place for the

convert. So long there is caste there will be no suddhi and no sanghathan in Hindu society and therefore Hindu society will remain divided and weak”^[15]. Indeed due to the caste system and divisive forces the Hindu kingdoms were weak and they were plundered invaded and ruled by foreign elements for a longer period of time. In fact Dr. Ambedkar’s logic and socio-political movements undoubtedly shocked Hindu orthodoxy and shook it out of its ancient torpor.

Dr. Ambedkar’s last contribution to public life was the pains taking work that he did as the first Law Minister of Free India for enacting the ‘Hindu Code Bill.’ The man who publicly burnt the Manusmriti in 1927 was himself the chief architect in giving to the Hindu community another Smriti as the law of living in conformity with the requirements and urges of modern time.

He studied Indian social problems and realized that illiteracy, ignorance and poverty were the root cause of social exploitation. So he founded the People’s Education Society in 1946 through which a number of primary and secondary schools and colleges were established. He was the first Indian who demanded the nationalization of land in order to eradicate poverty from Indian society”^[16].

The supreme principle for Dr. Ambedkar was the denunciation of traditional values and the establishment of new ideas. His argument was that caste had disorganized and demoralized the Hindus. So long as there is caste, Hinduism cannot be a missionary religion and caste will cease to be an operative force only when inter-dining and intermarriages become matter of common course. So in 1935 he advised his community at the Yeola Conference to leave Hinduism and search for equality and self-respect in any other religion”^[17]. He himself adopted Buddhism with thousands of untouchables and his acceptance of Buddhism became a boon for millions in Indian society. Had he accepted any other religion it might have created a political problem. Dr. Ambedkar was a social revolutionary and political thinker as well. He studied political theories of many philosophers as well as most of the constitutions of the world. Also his deep study on social problems enriched his political philosophy.

“Dr. Ambedkar has given more importance against internal disorder and external aggression”^[18]. He did not consider the state to be an absolute one. To him it was the people who made the state and without them there could be no state. In this sense the state is a means rather than an end in itself and it owes to its members a duty to build a social system within which the citizens might live happily. He did not agree with Hobbes. “He got and Bosanquet, the advocates of the theory of the absolutist state. He accepted the idea of the state that it has to secure the interests of individual and society as a servant and not a master. According to him the true freedom, intellectual and spiritual as well”^[19].

He was also opposed to the Machiavellian principle of state governing the people and keeping them down. According to him a good state is realistic and practical when it provides practical needs at the people. “A good state which guarantees protection against persecution of one community by another and also against internal disturbances violence and disorder in any parts of its territory”^[20].

“He also understood the role of judiciary in a civilized society. Law is the guardian of liberty and equality. All citizens are equal before the law and possess equal civic right. He tried to seek harmony between people and the legal power of the state”^[21] So he visualized the need for an independent judiciary to safeguard the right of individuals. “His whole theory of democratic organization to use the language of

Montesquieu may be characterized as the theory of ‘checks and balance’^[22]

Dr. Ambedkar’s liberalism was combined with a radical nationalism. His ethics were utilitarian his scales of value was determined by the usefulness of an action towards the establishment of equality in social order. His liberalism and utilitarianism resulted in his rejection of the teachings of the Vedic right because he thought “their contribution in philosophy created on social value”^[23].

Dr. Ambedkar was champion of democracy in every field of life social, economic and political. He was the first Indian political thinker who realized the inapplicability of the Western pattern of democracy to India. In his book ‘What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables’ he has gravely criticized the Western authors who failed to study the social and economic aspects of democracy.

The definition of democracy given by ‘Walter Bagehot or Abraham Lincoln ‘were not satisfactory to Dr. Ambedkar, Bagehot defines democracy as ‘a government by discussion’ and Lincoln as a ‘government of the people by the people and for the people.’ By democracy” Dr. Ambedkar refers to fundamental changes on the social and economic life of the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed”^[24] He appreciated ‘Harold Laski ‘for his insistence on the moral order as a requirement of democracy.

Thus democracy is not only a form of government but a way of life through which social justice can be established. Social justice demands that society should promote the welfare of all and not merely the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The ideology of Dr. Ambedkar was “one man one value, in all walks of life, political, economic and social”^[25] From the ideology of ‘one man one value’ it seems that Dr. Ambedkar profounded the highest form of democracy giving importance and value to each individual in society.

Dr. Ambedkar advocated state socialism in the field of industry and also nationalization agriculture with a collective method of cultivation. “He was one of the few Indian who demanded nationalization of insurance before the Government of India nationalized it”^[26].

He was of the opinion that more than 40 per cent of Indian populations including untouchables are poor and landless and they cannot benefit through consolidation of land or through tenancy legislation. Only collective farms can solve the problem of the landless laborer. Therefore Dr. Ambedkar writes. “The Plan has two special features. One is that proposes state socialism in important field of economic life. The second special feature of the plan is that it does not leave establishment of state socialism to the will of the state legislation. It established state socialism by the law of the Constitution and thus makes it unalterable by any act of legislature and the executive”^[27].

State socialism and political democracy are not antagonistic. Dr. Ambedkar wanted to establish state socialism not through dictatorship but through political democracy. He writes. “The problem therefore is to have state socialism with parliamentary democracy and to prescribe state socialism by the law of the Constitution. So that it will be beyond the reach of parliamentary majority to suspend amend or abrogate it. It is only by this that one can achieve the triple object namely: (a) to establish social; (b) parliamentary democracy and (c) avoid dictatorship”^[28] Dr. Ambedkar approached the Constitution Assembly to include the principles of socialism in the Fundamental Right and Directive Principles of State Policy but it is a matter of regret that the proposition was turned down by the majority.

Dr. Ambedkar had an important and responsible role as” the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar suggested that the official language of the whole state should be Hindi”^[29] He supported United India at the beginning. But when it was finally decided that India should be divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. ” Dr. Ambedkar at that time demanded the division of Punjab and Bengal and the territories to be added to Hindustan”^[30] From this Dr. Ambedkar ‘s patriotic activities are conspicuously remarkable. He was concerned for the unity and the integrity of the nation.

In the Constituent Assembly Dr. Ambedkar gave more power to the centre and made it strong. He made the centre strong not only to “save minorities from the misrule of majority”^[31] but also with the political purpose to unite and integrate the nation. Of course some members of the Constituent Assembly criticized him that since Dr. Ambedkar postulates rights and values of each individual and the development of each province and each village, it was therefore contradictory on his part to make the centre strong. But nobody understood his lofty foresight he wanted to Indian society its tradition and culture and he had been an eyewitness to the divisive forces as some of the princely states were thinking of not joining the Indian Union. This problem was solved by the courageous dynamism of Sardar Patel, Dr. Ambedkar explained in the Constituent Assembly the need for a strong Centre Government. “some critics have said that Centre is too strong. Others have said it must not be strong. The Draft Constitution has struck the balance. However much you may deny the power to the centre it is difficult to prevent the Centre from becoming strong. Conditions in the modern world are such that centralization of power is inevitable”^[32]. Dr. Ambedkar ‘s assertion was that the Indian society was not only divided into caste and class but also into region language tradition custom and culture and territorial integrity and administrative discipline.

Dr. Ambedkar ‘s life was a saga of struggle for human rights and dignity. His loyalty to India was as great as his hatred for the traditional values of the orthodox Hindu society. He was not only a social revolutionary and a political thinker but also an eminent educational, economist, jurist, constitutional expert a really multi-sided genius. He followed the principles of Lord Buddha and revived the consciousness of social democracy in Hindu society. “He rejected the orthodox scripture of Manu and compiled the ‘Hindu Code Bill ‘ giving socio-religious equality for mankind as a whole for which he was called Modern Manu”^[33]. His greatest contribution to India is the Constitution of India.

Dr. Ambedkar was a fervent nationalist. His patriotic contribution to the cause of freedom at the Round Table Conferences and his statesman like stand in the Constituent Assembly will long be remembered and cherished by the entire nation. “His bitter criticism of the British Government due to its inability to abolish untouchability from Indian society gave him a prominent position at the Round Table Conference”^[34] However his pragmatic approach to the Indian social and political problem enabled him to become one of the greatest revolutionaries in the 20th century. His revolution was not to be delivered through war and violence but to come through law and democracy. He was a leader more misunderstood than understood by all during his life time. Many people have criticized him and even many of his colleagues have withdrawn their support from his stand on many issues. Still he was a strong and determined stalwart in his crusade and in the end he triumphed.

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