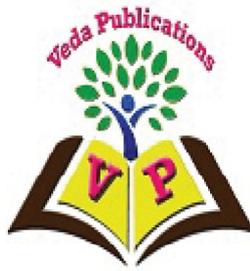


DR. B.R.AMBEDKAR AS THE MESSIAH OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES AND SOCIAL PROPHET OF THE UNTOUCHABLES EFFECTING A HEALTHY SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THEIR LIVES : AN APPRAISAL

Dr. S.Chelliah

(Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, MADURAI – 625 021. Tamil Nadu, India)

E-mail : aschelliah@yahoo.com



ABSTRACT

This paper brings out how Dr.B.R.Ambedkar portrays the lives of depressed classes and untouchables. India has different religions, castes and creeds. He not only brings out the cause of social justice for the untouchables, women, shudras but he has also worked vigorously throughout his life to create a civilized human society, by bringing about democratic revolution in the country. Dr.Ambedkar becomes an example for others, for formulating the society through his hard work and sincerity without any biased outlook towards all.

Keywords: Depressed Class, Untouchables, Social Problems, Civilized Society, Upper Class, Lower Class.

India is a vast country in which people belonging to different religions, castes and creeds live together. Despite the fact that they live in harmony and co-operation with one another, that harmony gets disturbed now and then and that disturbance creates many social problems. One common fact is that if the nation is to progress at all levels, what sounds essential is that all must feel regardless of caste, religion and community that they belong to one nation and one community, i.e. human community, so as to march forward to put an end to all social, cultural, economic and communal problems. Actually, it was sought to present India as a unified nation through the centrality of the Brahmanical tradition with its language and literature, its myths and symbols and its cultural systems and sub-systems. However, the proponents of monolithic unity of the ideology of 'one culture, one language, one nation' – Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan ended up rather ironically by paving the way for the recognition of divergence that ultimately led to the partition of India and continuous to be a fact of social disruption and conflict even today.

India today is going through a period of tremendous turbulence. The old consensus has broken down, the momentum of the freedom movement has petered out and a new equilibrium has not yet reached. There is a complex set of political, economic, social and communal factors with some disturbing manifestations in all spheres of life. The Indian polity and social system are now in a flux. The nation is under severe strain from violence, terrorism, communalism, corruption and casteism. The four basic assumptions on which the Indian State was founded – democracy, socialism, secularism and non-alignment are all in various stages of collapse. The system needs a complete rehaul – a wide ranging, upgrading and unified association on all fronts may be possible through a constitutional change and review. This constitution of India was founded by Dr.B.R.Ambedkhar, who is universally acknowledged as the Father of Indian Constitution.

When Swami Vivekananda is considered as one of the greatest architects of modern India and the most prominent among the spiritual ambassadors ever sent by India to foreign countries and one who shook

India out of her slumber and reawakened her soul, Sri Aurobindo as one of the major figures in the history of Indian Renaissance and Indian nationalism making strenuous attempts to represent the crystallization of new and rising soul of India with a spiritual message for humanity, Raja Ram Mohan Roy as the first great social and religious reformer of the nineteenth century symbolizing the reascent spirit of new India so as to bring about a synthesis of the East and the West leading to a cosmopolitan humanist culture, Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of Indian nation not only fighting for freedom but also with a fighting spirit to put an end to racial discrimination and social segregation, almost as the lone star that guided the destinies of fifty crore Indians leading them to a new dawn of Independence and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as the lone path maker for these millions of India to move along to a new heaven of peace and prosperity, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar has been called and known as the Messiah of the oppressed and depressed people of the Indian society. He may be renowned and honoured not only as a political leader, as a great jurist and framer of the Indian Constitution, but also remembered and will, no doubt, be remembered always in all ages for his unrelenting fight to abolish untouchability. In a word, it may be said that he was 'the social prophet of the untouchables and the Have-nots'.

Dr.B.R. Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 at Ambedkar village in Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra State. Ranji was his father to whom he was the 14th son. As he was a brilliant child at school, his teacher was so much impressed that he added a surname to him. It is also said that his earlier name was Bheemrao Ambavade and it was his teacher who made it Ambedkar and gave him the full name as Bheemrao Ramji Ambedkar. After schooling, Ambedkar studied F.A. at the Elphinstone College, Bombay. With the help of the Rajah of Baroda, Ambedkar went to Colombia University, America and completed his B.A. and M.A. degrees in 1912 and 1913 respectively. For his M.A. degree, he wrote a research paper entitled "Commerce in India" and he wrote many such research essays during his stay at Colombia. They are 1.Regions in India and their origin, 2.Nationalists in India: A historical study for which he was awarded

Ph.D. degree by the Colombia University. With this he became Dr. Ambedkar. After being awarded Doctoral Degree, he went to England to study Law. Besides, he studied Economics and Political Science and acquired the Degree of Barrister at Law. As Dr. Ambedkar had hailed from the community of Mahars who are condemned as untouchables, he had to face a number of problems and suffer unspeakable mental agony and tortures and he was looked down upon and ill-treated to the core. That is why he did his utmost to agitate against this cruel monster called 'untouchability'.

Co-operation is the basis of human life. The very word 'society' implied co-operation among its members. In the absence of this co-operation, society would have become extinct and man would have reverted to the state of nature which Hobbes in his 'Leviathan' speaks of. John Locke, the famous English philosopher believes reason to be the basis of human life and regards conflict and unreason only as exceptions. According to the social contract philosophers, the emergence of Government or society was an effort to rationalize the co-operative spirit of mankind for the common good. And yet some philosophers do not accept this theory and they believe that conflict is the law of life. They regard all development and evolution as a result of a process of conflict which eliminates the weak and preserves the strong and the highborn or the powerful and this way the process of the human race, which, they also believe may come about millions of years ahead or may never come about. Regarding conflict as the law of life, some philosophers have extended its operation from the individual to the classes. Thus, according to Marx, the history of mankind is nothing but the story of struggle between classes, between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

According to Walter Bagehot, human history is "story of conflict between groups". The strength of the group depends upon its organisation. The organisationally well-built groups are stronger and are in a position to subdue those which lack that organization and cohesion. The Process of elimination of the weaker groups leads to emergence of new conflicts between the different sections of the victorious organisations and then the elimination of the weaker groups eternally goes on and in this way, evolution of mankind is proceeding ahead. In India,

the class struggle is round the corner, thanks to the selfish motives of the opportunistic politicians. The politicians have fomented different kinds of divisive tendencies not only between several religious communities but also between different groups of the same community. There is to be witnessed a growing dichotomy between the higher classes and the scheduled classes. The so-called higher classes and the scheduled castes now seem to be clearly on two different and opposite fronts, ready to strike at each other thereby precipitating a class crisis fraught with some unimaginable disaster to the Indian body politic, especially to the section of people called 'untouchables'.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is, no doubt, a social philosopher with a focus on humanistic thinking, realistic attitude and rational thought thereby. Propounding a philosophy of humanism which has its roots, not in dogmas and renunciation but in rationalism and empiricism. That is why Dr. Ambedkar wanted a philosophy to be a theory as well as a practice. To him, "philosophy is no purely theoretic matter. It has practical potentialities. Philosophy has its roots in the problems of life and whatever theories philosophy propounds must return to society as instruments of re-constructing society. It is not enough to know. Those who know must endeavour to fulfill" (P 286). Philosophy, in fact, cannot arise out of nothing and for nothing. It has to emanate from the nature and problems of human life. His fundamental point is that Dr. Ambedkar's socio-philosophical outlook emanated from the roots of Indian society. His social critique has paved the way for human emancipation. The socio-philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar has become so much relevant to the current needs of social justice that it cannot be neglected by any political party or movement aiming at the well-being of the lowly and the weak, the deprived and the destitute. The emergence of his social humanism marked the beginning of a process of change destined to affect the lives of millions of people hitherto shunned and suppressed by the elitistic and exploitative classes. For a healthy social transformation, Dr. Ambedkar's life activity, thought process, vision coupled with a mission did a lot in deflecting the development of his intention among the masses. Truly speaking, the social

philosophy of Dr.Ambedkar is the light for those who are ignorant and indifferent towards the cause of suffering humanity in general and the guiding star for the depressed, suppressed, oppressed, lowly and the weaker sections of Indian society in particular.

D.R.JATAVA WRITES:

The inhuman social conditions of the servile classes – the Shudras and the Untouchables, naturally stirred his sensitive mind. So he anxiously devoted the earlier part of his life to the work of discovering the causes, which led to the development of the social system in India with its attendant evils of caste and untouchability (P 33).

In the words of Stanley Rice, the origin of untouchability is to be found in two circumstances – 'Race' and 'Occupation'. 1.The racial theory of the origin of Untouchability contains two elements:

- a) that the Untouchables are non-Aryans, non-Dravidian aboriginals and
- b) that they were conquered and subjugated by the Dravidians.

This theory holds that the 'Dravidians' conquered the 'non-Dravidians', aboriginals – the ancestors of the untouchables. According to the occupational theory of Untouchability, the clue is to be found in the 'unclean' and 'filthy' occupations of the untouchables. Dr.Ambedkar did not agree with the view that such occupations are the cause of untouchability, and agreed that the 'unclean' and 'filthy' occupations are 'common' to all human societies and that should be done by all irrespective of the high born and the lowly and from there did the fighting spirit spring up making him fight or rebel against all sorts of injustice done to the untouchables or Dalits.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, the savior of the Scheduled Castes, was a man of indomitable spirit and courage who excelled all others in analysing the complexities of the caste system. His intellectual honesty helped him to bring out the valuable book entitled "Annihilation of Caste" which got translated and published by Periyar E.V.R. in 1936 and this, reaching all sections of the Tamils, did a lot in creating awareness among the downtrodden castes about

abolition of untouchability and the caste system. As Dr.Ambedkar has put it,

In India, the majority is a communal majority, No matter what social and political programme it may have, the majority will retain its character of being a communal majority. The British type of Executive will make the minority a subject race. Such a state of affairs cannot be called democracy. It will have to be called Imperialism (16).

He demanded reservation for Scheduled Castes in the Legislative and Executive Spheres so that the majority rule and its imperialism will be destroyed. Socratic in his hatred of superstitions, Shavian in his crusade against Shams, Voltarian in his vendetta against the vindictive, Tolstoyan in his touching rural simplicity and Jinnayan in his subtle grabbing at leadership, Dr. Ambedkar is a rare compound of greatness and intellectual honesty. When Thomas Hardy was a 'peasant with a touch of the giant', Periyar EVR was 'a tradesman with a touch of the giant', Dr. Ambedkar was a Richard, the Lion-hearted crusader against all social evils and injustice entering into the world of feverish activity of upheaval and that of challenges in revolt for social justice and abolition of casteism. Dr.Ambedkar wrote and spoke rather vehemently thus:

Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public life is caste. His responsibility is only to his caste ... A Brahmin will follow a leader only if he is a Brahmin, a Kayasta if he is Kayasta and so. The capacity to appreciate merits in a man apart from his caste does not exist in a Hindu (P24).

Dr.Ambedkar has exposed in this, the crooked caste mindedness of every Hindu. It stands relevant even today. Himself, belonging to the Mahar caste – an untouchable Maharashtrian community – Dr.Ambedkar had experienced at first hand the agonies, anguish, frustration and humiliation of this degrading Hindu Brahminical social structure. Nobody can be opposed to his view that for the untouchable, the liberation from the degrading humiliations

imposed by Hinduism was a matter of more urgent necessity than even the political liberation from the alien British rule. It did not make him any less a patriot or a nationalist. His conversion to Buddhism shows that he contemplated a future for the untouchables somewhat in separation from the broad stream of the Hindu society. Gandhi did not want to disrupt the organic structure of the Hindu society. But Dr. Ambedkar wanted the separation of the untouchables from the Hindu society and hence demanded a separate Electorate.

Dr. Ambedkar's rise to eminence was facilitated by various social and political forces. He was out and out merciless in his denunciation of the pettiness, perversities and the hypocrisies of Brahminism, which, to him, was a wicked and mischievous agent of the social exploitation of the backward and untouchable sections of the Hindu society. According to Ambedkar, the Hindu scheme of social structure based on the four varnas or 'Chaturvana' breeds inequality and has been the parent of the caste – system and untouchability which are merely forms of inequality. He felt that the problems of the untouchables could not be solved by mere linking and palliatives. They demanded a radical social problem. Dr. Ambedkar expounded the theory of both social and political resistance because his main enemy was the caste-based Hindu feudalism. In his opinion, the depressed classes had to wage a struggle against the caste-Hindus and not against the Government. Though Dr. Ambedkar didn't completely approve Mahatma Gandhi's theory of 'Satyagraha', he used the term 'Satyagraha' for his movements. He held that the struggle against injustice was the basic tenet of this movement and maintained that the struggle against injustice should be begun by those who suffered most due to injustice. According to Ambedkar, the two important methods of Satyagraha were resistance and boycott. Resistance to injustice was necessary to secure basic human rights. The true import of the use of the word was that the so called untouchables should fight against injustice perpetrated by the thoughtless and Superstitious Hindus. The people should resist untouchability in speech and action. He maintained that the privileged people did not give up their ideas because their self-interest was

involved in it. Mere conciliation could not help because the caste-Hindus understood the language of strength. Hence, the depressed classes should resist all the unjust and oppressive practices by disobeying them. Along with resistance, he asked the people to follow the method of boycott. Boycott meant boycotting all the functions that the community performed for caste Hindus. He made it clear that methods of boycott and resistance were the methods of Lokmanaya Tilak and what he did in politics the depressed classes sought to do in social resistance of the depressed classes would automatically get converted into political resistance because the government was also involved in it. Hence, Satyagraha was logically aimed at the British government who did not give human rights to the untouchables and tried to please the Brahmins. Dr. Ambedkar made it clear that there should be equal political participation in the New Constitution and the depressed classes have a share in the political power. They could get representation through separate electorate because it would be extremely difficult for the self-respecting untouchable to get elected from a mixed constituency. For him, winning basic human rights for the depressed classes was more important than securing certain political rights. D.R. Jatava obviously remarks:

Dr. Ambedkar's cherished goal of an ideal society is to guarantee to all its members justice, political, social and economic and he ordained that the attainment of this human ideal would be democratic process. The acceptance of the democratic process for the establishment of a just society and an egalitarian welfare state is the most outstanding feature of Dr. Ambedkar's social and political thought (P 82).

When Gandhiji was considered the soul of India in agony, Nehru as its voice, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the savior of the depressed and oppressed classes. Wherever he spoke, millions came to listen to him and he sat with the spirit of voice for a social transformation when he inspired, provoked, criticised and admonished them, touching their pride and hope, awakening their minds to what they must do. He wanted to see a vision of reformed and changed Indian society, not only free from political bondage but also

free from ignorance, disease and poverty and he was faithful to his vision. He inspired and encouraged planned economic development which should benefit the poorest. Even while he took up a job as a professor in a college in 1918, he took part in 1920 in the first meet of the Depressed Classes held at Nagpur. When he started a paper namely "Bahishkita Hitakarini", he took up the cause of the Depressed Classes before the Simon Commission which visited India in 1928. He attended the First Round Table Conference held at London and argued that the Depressed Classes should have voting rights and the right to elect their own leaders. His intention was that all men should be equal in all matters. Once he entered the Veereshwar temple where Mahars were not allowed, a case was filed against him by the temple authorities. The court justified the action of Dr. Ambedkar. He could no longer reconcile to the domination of upper classes.

As a brilliant first Law Minister of India after we got Independence in 1947, Dr. Ambedkar did what best he could do so as to include in the constitution the required safeguards for the Depressed Classes. In fact, he took up in his writings and speeches the burning questions of social justice, political awakening and economic welfare and highlighted the anguish and oppression of the downtrodden, while demanding the shaping of a just future for the underprivileged and the outcastes. Here one can suggest a violent overthrow of the caste-ridden society but Dr. Ambedkar's advocacy of non-violent way of social change, along with a democratic way of life, was highly commendable in the existing conditions of social exclusiveness, caste tensions and communal forces. He knew pretty well that without the methods of peace and persuasion, social harmony and intellectual freedom of the people could not be persevered for posterity. Thus, non-violence, as he was inspired by the gospel of the Buddha, formed one of the main features of his philosophy of 'Social Humanism' for bringing about economic and political reforms in Indian society so as to ensure social democracy, for he himself said once; "political democracy cannot last unless there lie at the base of it social democracy" (speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25th November,

1949). He aimed at equality at all levels possible. To attest to the fact, at a speech delivered at Kanpur on 29th January 1944, about the Rise and Awakening of Depressed Classes in India, he said:

The government of India must be shared by the Hindus, Muslims and the untouchables and if the Scheduled Castes did not get a proper share in the conduct of the National government, they should launch a struggle to achieve the object (P 165).

He further remarked:

The system of electorate being a device for the protection of the minority, the issue. Whether the electoral system should be the joint electorate or separate electorate must be left to the wishes of the minority (States and Minorities 55).

The people of our society may agree to Dr. Ambedkar's 'economic order' of modern society, which he suggests as follows:

The way out seems to be to retain Parliamentary Democracy and to prescribe State socialism by the law of the Constitution, so that it will be beyond the reach of a Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it. It is only by this that one can achieve the triple object, namely, to establish socialism, retain Parliamentary Democracy and avoid Dictatorship (States and Minorities 34).

Dr. Ambedkar's sole intention was to bring about a democratic revolution in the country by the process of inversion i.e., putting the social order upside down, for he was a social prophet of the Untouchables.

To Conclude, whatever might have been the origin of the caste-system, it has been the most unjust social order in actual practice. Hence, Ambedkar deserves the credit for having made the Hindus aware of the great tension – generating social problems which must be tackled, otherwise, they may eventually bring about the doom not only of the Hindu society but of the total Indian political system as well. In the history of modern political thought, Dr. Ambedkar has a significant place because through his scholarly

writings, speeches leadership and constructive work, Dr. S.Chelliah
he has highlighted the political, economic and social
problems of the Depressed Classes and the vast
Untouchables. In a nutshell, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's life is
an example to others for he has shown how man born
in humble surroundings could rise up in life, by sheer
hard work, sincerity and steadfastness. No doubt, he
was the Messiah of the Depressed and social prophet
of the Untouchables and outcastes.

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