

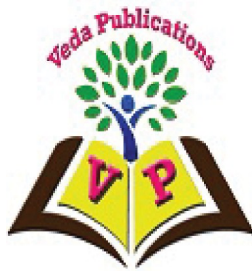


**DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR -
A MOUTH PIECE TO THE VOICELESS**

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Abstract

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar gained prominence as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and as a messiah for the depressed classes. Reading Dr.B.R.Ambedkar bridges the gap between what most Indians are schooled to believe in and the reality we experience every day of our lives and also alert everybody to a gaping hole in our pedagogical universe. Democracy hasn't eradicated caste. It has entrenched and modernized it.

Key words : Depressed Classes, Gaping Hole, Pedagogical Universe, Democracy, Mahad Satyagrah, Dehumanized Position.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in 1891 into an 'Untouchable' family of modest means. He is one of the India's most radical thinkers, and transformed the social and political landscape in the struggle against British colonialism. Ambedkar left behind vast writings and speeches and it is our duty to go back to his writings and speeches and think through his ideas, his vision, and his methods to bring change in ourselves and the society. Ambedkar was the first social reformer who rose from the community of untouchables and led a movement at national level for the liberation of the Dalits. Though there were several leaders who worked for the cause of the down trodden, for instance Mahatma Phule, Periyar, Narayana Guru, Vithal Rao Shinde, Aruna Desai, they belonged to the category of Hindus 'superior' to the untouchables. Though their dedication to the cause of the untouchables is unquestionable the movements led by them did not have an exclusive focus on eradication of untouchability and the emancipation of the untouchables.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Spokesman of the Voiceless: Many people consider the beginning of Ambedkar movement as his appearance in the public meeting held at the Damodar Hall in Bombay on 9 March 1924. But this is far from reality. One can see that the seeds of the movement had been laid down in his school days itself when he had undergone the trauma of casteism and untouchability. Certainly the young Ambedkar might have revolted against the casteism within the boundaries of his childhood.

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However, the overt crystallization of the movement in the form of social action was in the year 1920 when he established the Marathi fortnightly the 'Mooknayak'. Ambedkar started 'Mooknayak' at a juncture when the print media were in the hands of the upper caste Hindus, and it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any leader from the down trodden class to take the message of reformation to the people through a publication. When he sent a paid

advertisement announcing the publication of 'Mooknayak' to 'Keshari', it refused to publish, even though Lokmanya Tilak was still alive. The 'Mooknayak' was published with the financial support from Maharaja Chatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur and was aimed at making the untouchables aware of the dehumanized condition in which they were living. The editorials of the magazine, though at the very beginning of his public career, are indicative of the directions in which his mind was working. In the very first editorial of 'Mooknayak' he dealt with the hierarchical structure of the Hindu society which included the three major castes - the Brahmins, the non - Brahmins and the untouchables. Apart from the criticism of the Hindu social order and the Congress, Ambedkar used the editorial column of the Mooknayak to expose the caste - Hindu social reformers like Tilak, V.R. Shinde etc. The Brahmins at the top of the social hierarchy had access to religious as well as secular education and because of this they were represented in Government jobs in large numbers, quite out of proportion to their number in the population. The non-Brahmin caste Hindus had remained backward, because they did not give any importance to education, though they had social and religious sanction for the same. The untouchables on the other hand were not only denied access to education but also were forced to stick to their lowly occupation. They were totally debarred from any opportunity for self development. In such a condition of social apathy Ambedkar made clear his position on the nationalist movement, that it was not enough for India to become independent, but the country must extend equal rights - social, religious and political - to all its inhabitants, irrespective of caste and creed and would open the channels of development to all sections of society.

FREEDOM FOR WHOM?

The Indian National Congress had replaced its objectives of achieving 'Good Government' with the attainment of 'Self Government'. On this Ambedkar wrote: While one cannot object to the principle involved, we would not be able to support. Whose self government is this going to be and what will be its practical goals - for practice is more important than principle². He wanted that the untouchables should

also have a share in such self - government; without it the 'self government' would mean a government over the already depressed. He urged further that the untouchables should receive not just a proportionate but a weighted representation in the legislatures. He was totally opposed to the suggestion that the representatives of the untouchables be chosen by nomination. Thus, through the 'Mooknayak' Ambedkar not only raised the strident voice of the untouchables for their share in the proposed measures of self government but also accused the Congress of the deliberate neglect of the interest of the untouchables.. who had kept the Government ignorant of the true condition of the untouchables and had opposed their efforts to obtain a share in political power through independently chosen representatives. He remarked that the exposing of the game that the caste Hindu leadership was trying to play was a signal for a new awakening among the untouchables. His main objective was to establish a separate identity of the untouchable in the Indian society. Ambedkar is the greatest revolutionary that India has ever seen; when the whole India was fighting against the slavery from the external source he stood alone against internal slavery that a group of people was undergoing. To him India's political freedom is useless unless and until it attains social justice inside its boundaries.

THE LAKE OF LIBERATION – MAHAD SATYAGRAHA

The term 'satyagraha' was coined by Gandhi in 1906. While Ambedkar used the method of Satyagraha on many occasions, he always had a great awareness of the questions of 'whose satyagraha' and 'satyagraha against whom'. If one of Gandhi's first major political actions was the 'solution' to the problem of the Durban Post Office, Ambedkar's was the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927. He had full faith in the utility of the method but the skepticism he had about the effectiveness of Satyagraha is reflected in a speech he delivered at Mahad, where he noted that:

"It is not that you can solve all your problems by Satyagraha. This is only a request to the upper-class Hindu mind. This Satyagraha movement is going to prove whether the Hindu mind treats human beings like human beings. This Satyagraha is to change the

hearts of Hindus. This movement will decide whether Hindu mind regards humanity in the new age."

In 1923, the Legislative Council of Bombay passed a resolution, the Bole Resolution that allowed Untouchables to use public tanks, wells, schools, courts and dispensaries. In the town of Mahad, the municipality declared that it had no objection if Untouchables used the Chavadar Tank in the town. Passing a resolution was one thing, acting on it was quite another. After four years of mobilization, the Untouchables gathered courage and in March 1927, held a two-day conference in Mahad. Money for the conference was raised by public contribution. The Mahad conference was attended by about three thousand Untouchables, and a handful of progressive members of the privileged castes. V.D.Savarkar was one of the supporters of the Mahad Satyagraha. Ambedkar presided over the meeting, Dr.Ambedkar said:

"We are not going to the Chavadar Tank to mere drink its water. We are going to the tank to assert that we too are human beings like others. It must be clear that this meeting has been called to set up the norm of equality."

On the morning of the March 20th, the second day, people decided to march to the Chavadar Tank and drink water. The privileged castes watched in horror as a procession of Untouchables walked through the town, and drank water from the tank. Immediately a violent counter-attack took place in which twenty Untouchables were injured. Dr. Ambedkar urged his people to stay firm and not to strike back. Once calm returned, the Brahmins 'purified' the tank with prayers, cow dung, cow urine, milk and ghee. Dr Ambedkar was so disgusted by this gesture; he and his comrades eventually went on to burn *Manusmriti* at the same spot later in the year (December 25, 1927). The symbolic exercise of their rights did not satisfy the Mahad Satyagrahis. It was a peaceful protest but quite revolutionary in its implications. It was a worship of water.

Thus, Ambedkarism is of great relevance to the Indian society even today in achieving social



justice, removal of untouchability, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy.

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