

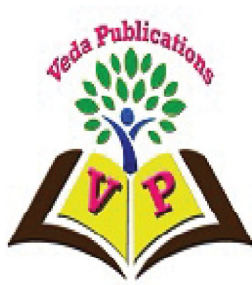


DR B. R. AMBEDKAR: THE TREASURED ICON OF THE DALITS

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ABSTRACT

The article "Dr B. R. Ambedkar: The Treasured Icon of the Dalits" highlights the hardships faced by Dr B. R. Ambedkar in fulfilling his dream of restoring equal status for the dalits of the Hinduism. The paper recounts the humiliations that Dr Ambedkar encountered as a child and how he grew up amid the constant insults. It presents Ambedkar's views on inequality and ultimate hard it does to democracy.

Key words : *Ambedkar's Childhood, Role of Education, Caste System, Inequality in Social Structures.*



Unlike the childhood of other normal children, Ambedkar's childhood is pathetic and heartrending. He did not play with his classmates as his caste erected a huge barrier between them. Once he and his brother took a cart at Masur Railway station to see their father and in the midst, the cart driver found that they were from Mahar caste and practically tumbled them down and left them to their fate in the scorching sun. Helpless brothers walked the distance and ventured to drink from a well and were beaten brutally. On a different occasion, on a rainy day, when Ambedkar took shelter near the wall of a house, he was kicked into the rain wherein his books got drenched in muddy water.

Ambedkar had a strong desire to learn Sanskrit but Sanskrit learning was restricted only to the children of high caste. Unlike most children of his caste, young Bhim attended school. However, his Dalit friends and he were not allowed to sit inside the class. The teachers would not touch their notebooks in school. They were not allowed to drink water on their own unless the peon poured water from a height. Ambedkar recounts the plight which evokes tears, "No Peon No water. They tried to bury me. They didn't know I was a seed."

Ambedkar's patriotic fervor has no bounds. He preferred to settle in India rather going abroad. He believes that, "We are Indians, firstly and lastly." He had encountered many a hardship in life and his ultimate urge for knowledge and excess love for reading made him a distinct persona of his period. He spared 18 hours for study and hardly slept. He hailed from a humble middle class Dalit family settled in Mumbai that had meager money to spend. He had his education on the scholarship by Shahu Mahraj of Baroda.

He narrates an incident in which the Jews prove to be far caste tolerant than some of our caste biased Indians. He could get the love and human touch from a Jew although he was denied of the same from the Indian aristocrats. Once he was eating a loaf of bread sitting in the library during lunch hour and suddenly caught by the Jew librarian, who taxed him with a fine and wished to cancel his membership. Ambedkar had no other go except revealing his

miserable condition that his purse did not permit him to eat in cafeteria unlike others. The Jew librarian got carried, felt bad at his pitiable condition and wanted to share his lunch with him. As a mark of gratitude Ambedkar wrote many a book on Jews.

While studying in Columbia University, Ambedkar was so inquisitive to read books that he used to visit Library even before the peon opened it. He used to plead the peon to extend library hours so that he could read more. The astonished peon enquired the reason for his seriousness in reading. He replied, "If I sit, who will look after them." He believed in education as the only way to success. By the dint of hard work, he rose to become the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India. He was a multifaceted personality with a strong will and determination to end the inequality prevailing in the society. When it was the time to decide the National Language, Babasaheb desired to make Sanskrit but Hindi became the National Language. In a meeting people were wonder struck to note Ambedkar fluently conversing in Sanskrit with Mr. Sastri and this gathered a lot of attention from media. The scholarship as well as intellectuality of Ambedkar was internationally acclaimed.

Ambedkar felt that the untouchability is nothing but an idea of defilement. He was shocked to note that 429 communities were listed out by the Government of India in 1935. These communities had the hereditary untouchability. However, there was no untouchability during Vedic times. Though it is difficult to fix the exact period for the origin or the birth of untouchability, there are some indications that it was born some time about 400 A.D. "It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism." (*The Untouchables: Who were they and Why they Became Untouchables*)

Ambedkar could realize that "Caste" played a crucial role in the Hindu society in subverting the other fellow human beings. He had the bitter experiences not only as a child but also as a full-fledged barrister as the people of higher caste could not accept him and his position. But he did not give up his mission and believed that "cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence." All through his life,

he embarked upon the journey of resolving contradictions and giving the untouchables a life of self-respect and identity. He felt that the meaning of "Swaraj" would be incomplete without extending the equal rights to the dalits.

How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up. (B. R. Ambedkar, *Writing and Speeches*)

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