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Social Justice And Ambedkar

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Abstract: Untouchable communities, such as the chuhras, bhangis and chamars, started their struggle for liberation under the saint-poets such as Ruidas, Kabirdas and Nanakdas and soon. I, in this paper would focus on the untouchables' fight against the Zamindars and high-castes in the Colonial period. B. R. Ambedkar was one of the most outstanding politicians in India who greatly influenced the Dalit people. The main attempt has been made to trace out the contribution of Ambedkar in the context of the untouchable class uplift. Most studies of untouchable are limited to a strictly cultural framework. But this paper highlights uplift of untouchable class as essential the process of empowerment, economic, social and political, the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes in the society. Various steps have been taken the Government for the uplift of the Dalit class through reservation system. Now the question arises "how far has been it successful? This paper seeks to highlight the uplift of the untouchables in society and also its importance in the present era.

Now-a-days Dalit is a modern term for untouchables. The term Dalit has been derived from the Sanskrit root *dal* which means broken, downtrodden, split, ground-down. It is an expression of the existing contradiction, inequality and exploitation in the Indian social hierarchy. Untouchability in the caste system is one of the cruelest features of the *varna* system. The untouchables had almost no right in the society in ancient times. They were not permitted to touch four *varna* people and they were also not permitted to enter the temples. They were confined to despicable jobs of sweepers, gutter cleaners and scavengers, watchmen and farm labors etc. At the end of the 19th century, the British began recording caste and untouchables castes based usually on occupation, such as Doms, Dhobis, Mahar, Bhandis and Chamer. The British granted special political representative to the untouchables, who had become politically mobilized under the leadership of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956).¹ He was one of the greatest jurists, lawyers and political leaders of modern India. During this period, according to various services the Hindu people were divided into three groups: Brahmin and allied castes, the intermediate classes and the backward classes including untouchables.² The untouchables were treated in distinct ways in different provinces in India. Thus it can be said that Untouchable, also called Dalit, officially Scheduled Caste, formerly *Harijan*, in traditional Indian society.³

The Indian National Congress wanted to resolve the abolish untouchability in 1917; we can now begin to answer the question of who will lead the untouchables. Ambedkar said that this 'a strange event.'⁴ In this respect, it provides us with an entry into the political field upon which elite nationalism constructed the untouchables' as a discrete community. At this time, the Congress called for the abolition of untouchability. In this perspective, Ambedkar's pointed out that, the resolution was a 'strange event' because the Congress "forgot the Resolution the very day on which it was passed. The Resolution was a dead letter. Nothing came out of it."⁵ He is known as the

leader of India's untouchables and his political thought and action was also formed in relationship to his own caste (Mahar caste). He was born in Mhow (now Mahu) in Madhya Pradesh. It seemed that two major events had changed his leadership direction. These events were- the Mahad Conferences of 1927 and the battle with Gandhi over the Communal Award during the Round Table Conferences of 1930-32.⁶ The Congress adopted first resolution in 1917 to the early 1930s, the Congress was not involved in organizing against untouchability. But Ambedkar pointed out that "Mr Gandhi does not appear to have taken any active steps for the removal of Untouchability or get himself interested in any activity beneficial to the Untouchable during this period."⁷ P D Kaushik was careful to point out: "from 1924 to 1931 the Congress several times repeated its resolve to root out the plant of untouchability."⁸ Now, the question comes to our mind that did the untouchables not hear from their would-be benefactors until the early 1930s?

The All Indian Hindu Mahasabha was held at Benares in 1923, the conference proclaimed that "it is necessary to make arrangements for their education on sanitation and religions, also to allow them to read in schools, to draw water from wells, to visit in temples and to sit in public meetings"⁹ It was stated that Hindu reform groups had already been working through All India Achhutodhar committee, Panjab Achhut Udhar Mandal (1926), Shradhananda Dalituddhar Shabha (1921), Jat Pat Torak Mandal (1922), Dalituddhar Mandal (1923). It seemed that the *Hindu Mahasabha*, the guardians of the untouchables was "a strange event", and Ambedkar felt it was an insult.¹⁰ Here the questions arise was the relationship of the *Hindu Mahasabha* with the untouchables, and why were they more suited to the work of abolishing untouchability than the Congress? From the untouchable's point of view, Ambedkar warned that "not to believe those Hindus *Sanghatanists* who were wooing them because of the rising menace of the Muslim pressure."¹¹ In this perspective, Ambedkar was bitterly opposed to the *Mahasabha* stand. He asserted that the Mahasabha was not a social reform organization but a purely political group. Its main aim was to oppose Muslim influence in Indian politics. He blamed the Congress of shifting its anti-untouchability programme to the *Hindu Mahasabha*.¹² The Untouchables needed to lead themselves. Ambedkar opposed to the caste system, particularly of Brahmanism and he believed that caste system would have to nothing could emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of caste. He said that the Brahmins were responsible for the degradation of the Sudras.¹³

In this situation, the Round Table Conferences were held in London (1930-1932) to recommend a workable solution to the Indian Constitutional problems. At the end of the Second Round Table Conference of 1932, the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced Communal Awards¹⁴ (1932) which led the problems of different communities various stands. The Poona Pact was signed on 24th September, 1932 which increased the untouchable's representative in the legislative Assembly. This pact guaranteed the reservation seats for untouchables but it's showed the difference philosophy and tactics between Gandhi and Ambedkar. In the early stage, Gandhi believed that untouchability can be removed the changing heart of the caste Hindus. But Ambedkar seemed that the guarantee of rights, backed up by political power. The separate electorate system was acted in the Reform Act of 1935. From the untouchable point of view, D. D Kosambi argued that the act of articulating an anti-colonial alliance between the elite nationalists and the subaltern masses. A recent example of this approach is provided by Kosambi who says that "when the 1930 *satyagraha* got out of hand and was about to be transformed into a fundamentally different movement by the no-rent and no-tax campaigns in 1932, Gandhi discovered the need for the uplift of the untouchables, and the whole movement was neatly sidetracked"¹⁵ It may be noted that Gandhi was in no position to launch a radical movement against untouchability given his need to reassert control over Indian nationalism in the early 1930s. It may be questioned if Untouchables are Hindus then why should they not purify their religion by taking possession of a temple? and why should they wait for it to be 'purified by the trustees and the worshippers recognizing?¹⁶

Until 1935, B. R. Ambedkar's work took three directions, the most visibly successful was the awakening and organizing of the Untouchables through newspaper of their own and social, political, cultural and widely attended conferences that is called Depressed Classes conferences. He gave petition to the British government for political representation for Untouchables. In his last direction he wanted to encourage education among the lower class under the Peoples Education Society. In this context, he believed that only Untouchables could lead Untouchables. So he never joined or supported any caste Hindu-led group, he invited higher caste Hindu leaders to serve on his institutes and also activities. He seemed that untouchable self-improvement, and continues wrote and spoke against bad practices (drinking and the eating of carrion beef) which were associated with lower caste behavior and they leave these practices and got self-respect. It is, however clear that Untouchables believed their inability to participate in the religious life around them, it felt that he never much trust in the ability of Hinduism to reform itself.¹⁷ Once Dr Ambedkar boldly declared, "I was born on Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu" and also stated that 'change your religion, reject Hinduism and convert to a religion that does not recognize caste or untouchability. Ultimately, both Ambedkar and Gandhi were right: in order to abolish untouchability ---"¹⁸ Ambedkar protested against the limits of Gandhianism and he commented that the nation does not exist. His main aims were attack on the system of political and social representation and economic structures disrupted.

At that time, Ambedkar formed a political party named the Independent Labour Party. He established the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 for united Untouchables all over India and to demand for separate electorates again. During the period from 1942 to 1946, Ambedkar was harshly critical of the Congress. He was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1946; he was also nominated for the cabinet post of Minister of Law. The Constituent Assembly was formed headed by Ambedkar, a Dalit leader in 1946. But the early stages of drafting the Constitution, he faced two major problems – Firstly, how to protect the rights of the Untouchables? Secondly, to reject the British Communal Electorate System and how to keep intact the rights of the Dalit people in the new electorate system?¹⁹ In this context, a Sub-Committee was formed for solve the problems under the leadership of Sardar Patel and the other members were Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Pandit Jawaharwal Nehru, Dr Rajendra Prasad and K. M. Munshi. This Sub-Committee recommended for reservation for Dalit Classes.²⁰ All these demands became the part of independent India's government policy. It is stated that Dalits are the bottom of the Hindu caste system and laws try to protect them, they still face widespread distinction in India. Ambedkar was a prolific writer and he wrote 'Who were the Sudras?', 'The Untouchable Castes in India', 'The Buddha and His Dhamma', and 'Pakistan or the Partition of India', etc. Until 1948, Ambedkar's theory did not appear but in 1948 his theory published in book name the title '*The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables*'. In his book Ambedkar's denied a racial, ethnic or occupational basis for the origin of Untouchability. He also mentioned that Untouchables were pushed aside in the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism which has so completely mould the history of India.²¹

Ambedkar devoted himself in his life of over 40 years to a set of principles, standards and goals relating to the removal of Untouchability in the society. These can be identified as follow:

- i) Untouchables must possess self-respect; disassociate them from the traditional promise of the Untouchable status.
- ii) Untouchables must be represented by their own representatives in social and political aspects. Till the Round Table Conferences of 1930-32, Ambedkar's wanted for reserved seats in a general electorate only. He believed that Untouchables must be seen as a minority and treated as a separate people.
- iii) All types of caste must be abolished. Ambedkar regarded as true that caste had been created by man and it could be removed with by man.
- iv) Untouchables must become educated, not only to literacy but to get highest level of education.

v) The government must take responsibility for the welfare of the Untouchables' people, creating special rights for those to whom society had denied education and occupation opportunities.²²

It asserted that the Indian Constitution requires the state to treat all citizens equally, without regard to birth, gender or religious aspects. Yet the Constitution provided special care and advancement of the Untouchables. For instance, we can mention two articles²³ here:

Article 15(2) declares: "No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex----with regard to- access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainments: or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resorts maintained"

Article 17 declares: "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out Untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law."

The contribution made by Dr, B.R. Ambedkar for an untouchable is very commendable. He is the person who inspired the downtrodden people to live a life of self respect, responsibility and dignity. He is the real champion of human rights; he secured equal rights for Dalits in Indian constitution. The Constitution of India provides equal rights to all citizens, right to live with equality, honour and dignity. It is the right time to adopt the principles of Ambedkar. So the people of upper classes will have to change their mentality. He secured equal rights for Dalits in Indian constitution. After Independence, the Indian Government set up various commissions and passed acts as follows—Kalelkar Commission (1953-1955), Untouchability Prohibition Act (1955) and Mandal Commission (1979-1980) etc. But ultimately, these steps failed to remove the untouchability in our society; the debate is going on among the scholars. In this connection, a question naturally comes, how far the Untouchability can be removed? Now-a-days, there is a deep crisis regarding the untouchables and they are still being insulted by upper caste people. There is no doubt that a dalit child who is born with a stamp on his forehead can never get rid of it. In the end, the Dalits are still Dalit, still broken and still suppressed. There is no doubt that Dr Ambedkar was the most famous and the militant champion of the untouchables. He stood for the social liberation, economic emancipation and political advancement of the untouchables. In the present time, the majority of Untouchables are remaining landless, desperately poor and illiterate. In this connection we may point out that Ambedkar devoted himself to improve the living conditions of the Untouchables. In the early stage we noticed a conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi regarding the untouchables. But both recognized the power of the term untouchable. At the end of their life, both began to admire each other regarding the problem of untouchability. Ambedkar ultimately recognized Gandhi's contribution and acknowledged that the untouchables had been nearest and dearest to Gandhi. Thus it can be said that Ambedkar's contribution as a scholar, parliamentarian and a reformer was well-known. In conclusion, it is quite clear that the untouchability cannot be removed through laws; we have to change people's minds and grow awareness. Dr Ambedkar's thought regarding untouchability will continue to be of great relevance in the socio-political and cultural fields in India. In conclusion, it is quite clear that untouchability cannot be removed through laws; we have to change peoples' minds and grow awareness.

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