

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016

Ambedkar's thought on Caste and Untouchability in India

Dr. Amita Chawadha

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (14 April 1891 – 6 December 1956) was an Indian jurist, economist, social reformer and political leader who headed the committee drafting the Constitution of India from the Constituent Assembly debates, served as Law and Justice minister in the first cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru, and inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement after renouncing Hinduism. Ambedkar graduated from Elphinstone College, University of Bombay, and studied economics at Columbia University and the London School of Economics, receiving doctorates in 1927 and 1923 respectively and was among a handful of Indian students to have done so at either institution in the 1920s. He also trained in the law at Gray's Inn, London. In his early career, he was an economist, professor, and lawyer. His later life was marked by his political activities; he became involved in campaigning and negotiations for India's independence, publishing journals, advocating political rights and social freedom for Dalits, and contributing significantly to the establishment of the state of India. In 1956, he converted to Buddhism, initiating mass conversions of Dalits.

In 1990, the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, was posthumously conferred on Ambedkar. The salutation Jai Bhim (lit. "Hail Bhim") used by followers honours him. He is also referred to by the honorific Babasaheb (BAH-bə SAH-hayb).

KEYWORDS: Ambedkar, caste, untouchability, India, Constitution, Dalits, Assembly, Bharat Ratna

I. INTRODUCTION

As Ambedkar was educated by the Princely State of Baroda, he was bound to serve it. He was appointed Military Secretary to the Gaikwad but had to quit in a short time. He described the incident in his autobiography, waiting for a Visa.



Thereafter, he tried to find ways to make a living for his growing family. He worked as a private tutor, as an accountant, and established an investment consulting business, but it failed when his clients learned that he was an untouchable. In 1918, he became Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai. Although he was successful with the students, other professors objected to his sharing a drinking-water jug with them.

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016

Ambedkar had been invited to testify before the Southborough Committee, which was preparing the Government of India Act 1919. At this hearing, Ambedkar argued for creating separate electorates and reservations for untouchables and other religious communities. In 1920, he began the publication of the weekly Mooknayak (Leader of the Silent) in Mumbai with the help of Shahu of Kolhapur, that is, Shahu IV (1874–1922).[1]

Ambedkar went on to work as a legal professional. In 1926, he successfully defended three non-Brahmin leaders who had accused the Brahmin community of ruining India and were then subsequently sued for libel. Dhananjay Keer notes, "The victory was resounding, both socially and individually, for the clients and the doctor".



Ambedkar, chairman of the Drafting Committee, presenting the final draft of the Indian Constitution to Rajendra Prasad, president of the Constituent Assembly, on 25 November 1949.

While practising law in the Bombay High Court, he tried to promote education to untouchables and uplift them. His first organised attempt was his establishment of the central institution Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, intended to promote education and socio-economic improvement, as well as the welfare of "outcastes", at the time referred to as depressed classes. For the defence of Dalit rights, he started many periodicals like Mook Nayak, Bahishkrit Bharat, and Equality Janta.

He was appointed to the Bombay Presidency Committee to work with the all-European Simon Commission in 1925. This commission had sparked great protests across India, and while its report was ignored by most Indians, Ambedkar himself wrote a separate set of recommendations for the future Constitution of India.[2]

By 1927, Ambedkar had decided to launch active movements against untouchability. He began with public movements and marches to open up public drinking water resources. He also began a struggle for the right to enter Hindu temples. He led a satyagraha in Mahad to fight for the right of the untouchable community to draw water from the main water tank of the town. In a conference in late 1927, Ambedkar publicly condemned the classic Hindu text, the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), for ideologically justifying caste discrimination and "untouchability", and he ceremonially burned copies of the ancient text. On 25 December 1927, he led thousands of followers to burn copies of Manusmriti. Thus annually 25 December is celebrated as Manusmriti Dahan Din (Manusmriti Burning Day) by Ambedkarites and Dalits.[3]

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016



The statue of B. R. Ambedkar in the Parliament of India

In 1930, Ambedkar launched the Kalaram Temple movement after three months of preparation. About 15,000 volunteers assembled at Kalaram Temple satyagraha making one of the greatest processions of Nashik. The procession was headed by a military band and a batch of scouts; women and men walked with discipline, order and determination to see the god for the first time. When they reached the gates, the gates were closed by Brahmin authorities.

II. DISCUSSION

In 1932, the British colonial government announced the formation of a separate electorate for "Depressed Classes" in the Communal Award. Mahatma Gandhi fiercely opposed a separate electorate for untouchables, saying he feared that such an arrangement would divide the Hindu community. Gandhi protested by fasting while imprisoned in the Yerwada Central Jail of Poona. Following the fast, congressional politicians and activists such as Madan Mohan Malaviya and Palwankar Baloo organised joint meetings with Ambedkar and his supporters at Yerwada. On 25 September 1932, the agreement, known as the Poona Pact was signed between Ambedkar (on behalf of the depressed classes among Hindus) and Madan Mohan Malaviya (on behalf of the other Hindus). The agreement gave reserved seats for the depressed classes in the Provisional legislatures within the general electorate. Due to the pact the depressed class received 148 seats in the legislature instead of the 71, as allocated in the Communal Award proposed earlier by the colonial government under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. The text used the term "Depressed Classes" to denote Untouchables among Hindus who were later called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the India Act 1935, and the later Indian Constitution of 1950. In the Poona Pact, a unified electorate was in principle formed, but primary and secondary elections allowed Untouchables in practice to choose their own candidates.[4]

Ambedkar published his book Annihilation of Caste on 15 May 1936. It strongly criticised Hindu orthodox religious leaders and the caste system in general, and included "a rebuke of Gandhi" on the subject.

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016



Later, in a 1955 BBC interview, he accused Gandhi of writing in opposition of the caste system in English language papers while writing in support of it in Gujarati language papers. During this time, Ambedkar also fought against the khoti system prevalent in Konkan, where khots, or government revenue collectors, regularly exploited farmers and tenants. In 1937, Ambedkar tabled a bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly aimed at abolishing the khoti system by creating a direct relationship between government and farmers.[5]

In his work *Who Were the Shudras?*, Ambedkar tried to explain the formation of untouchables. He saw Shudras and Ati Shudras who form the lowest caste in the ritual hierarchy of the caste system, as separate from Untouchables. Ambedkar oversaw the transformation of his political party into the Scheduled Castes Federation, although it performed poorly in the 1946 elections for Constituent Assembly of India. Later he was elected into the constituent assembly of Bengal where Muslim League was in power.

III. RESULTS

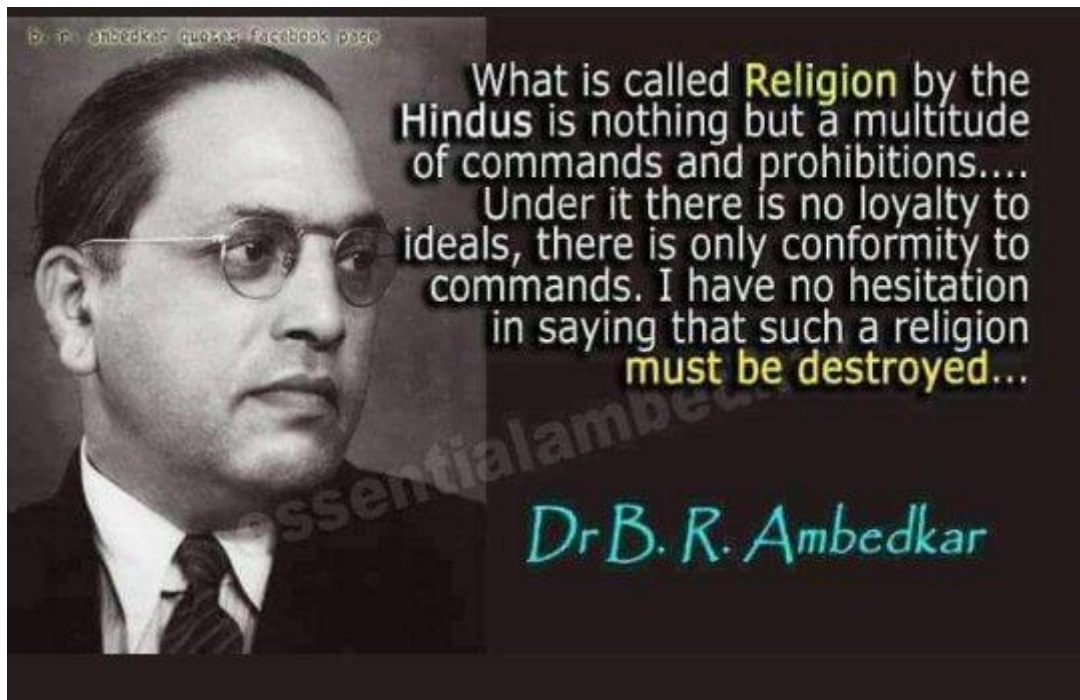
Ambedkar was the first Indian to pursue a doctorate in economics abroad. He argued that industrialisation and agricultural growth could enhance the Indian economy. He stressed investment in agriculture as the primary industry of India. According to Sharad Pawar, Ambedkar's vision helped the government to achieve its food security goal. Ambedkar advocated national economic and social development, stressing education, public hygiene, community health, residential facilities as the basic amenities. His DSc thesis, *The problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Solution* (1923) examines the causes for the Rupee's fall in value. In this dissertation, he argued in favour of a gold standard in modified form, and was opposed to the gold-exchange standard favoured by Keynes in his treatise *Indian Currency and Finance* (1909), claiming it was less stable. He favoured the stoppage of all further coinage of the rupee and the minting of a gold coin, which he believed would fix currency rates and prices. He also analysed revenue in his PhD dissertation *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. In this work, he analysed the various systems used by the British colonial government to manage finances in India. His views on finance were that governments should ensure their expenditures have "faithfulness, wisdom and economy." "Faithfulness" meaning governments should use money as

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016

nearly as possible to the original intentions of spending the money in the first place. "Wisdom" meaning it should be used as well as possible for the public good, and "economy" meaning the funds should be used so that the maximum value can be extracted from them.[6]



In 1951, Ambedkar established the Finance Commission of India. He opposed income tax for low-income groups. [15] He contributed in Land Revenue Tax and excise duty policies to stabilise the economy. He played an important role in land reform and the state economic development. According to him, the caste system, due to its division of labourers and hierarchical nature, impedes movement of labour (higher castes would not do lower-caste occupations) and movement of capital (assuming investors would invest first in their own caste occupation). His theory of State Socialism had three points: state ownership of agricultural land, the maintenance of resources for production by the state, and a just distribution of these resources to the population. He emphasised a free economy with a stable Rupee which India has adopted recently. He advocated birth control to develop the Indian economy, and this has been adopted by Indian government as national policy for family planning. He emphasised equal rights for women for economic development. Ambedkar's views on agricultural land was that too much of it was idle, or that it was not being utilized properly. [7] He believed there was an "ideal proportion" of production factors that would allow agricultural land to be used most productively. To this end, he saw the large portion of people who lived on agriculture at the time as a major problem. Therefore, he advocated industrialization of the economy to allow these agricultural labourers to be of more use elsewhere.

Ambedkar was trained as an economist, and was a professional economist until 1921, when he became a political leader. He wrote three scholarly books on economics:

- Administration and Finance of the East India Company
- The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India
- The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution[8]

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), was based on the ideas that Ambedkar presented to the Hilton Young Commission. Ambedkar said in 1935 that he was born a Hindu but would not die a Hindu. He viewed Hinduism as an "oppressive religion" and started to consider conversion to any other religion. In Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar claims that the only lasting way a true casteless society could be achieved is through destroying the belief of the sanctity of the Shastras and denying their authority. Ambedkar was critical of Hindu religious texts and epics and wrote a work titled Riddles in Hinduism in 1954 to 1955. The work was published posthumously by combining individual chapter manuscripts and resulted in mass demonstrations and counter demonstrations. Ambedkar viewed Christianity to be incapable of fighting injustices. He wrote that "It is an incontrovertible fact that Christianity was not enough to end the slavery of the Negroes in the United States. A civil war was necessary to give the Negro the freedom which was denied to him by the Christians." [9]

Ambedkar criticized distinctions within Islam and described the religion as "a close corporation and the distinction that it makes between Muslims and non-Muslims is a very real, very positive and very alienating distinction". [14]

He opposed conversions of depressed classes to convert to Islam or Christianity added that if they converted to Islam then "the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real" and if they converted to Christianity then it "will help to strengthen the hold of Britain on the country". Initially, Ambedkar planned to convert to Sikhism but he rejected this idea after he discovered that British government would not guarantee the privileges accorded to the untouchables in reserved parliamentary seats. On 16 October 1956, he converted to Buddhism just weeks before his death. [10]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Education Department, Government of Maharashtra (Mumbai) published the collection of Ambedkar's writings and speeches in different volumes.

- *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development and 11 Other Essays*
- *Ambedkar in the Bombay Legislature, with the Simon Commission and at the Round Table Conferences, 1927–1939*
- *Philosophy of Hinduism; India and the Pre-requisites of Communism; Revolution and Counter-revolution; Buddha or Karl Marx*
- *Riddles in Hinduism* ISBN 978-81-89059-77-4 [11]
- *Essays on Untouchables and Untouchability*
- *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*
- *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables ?*
- *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936)
- *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946)
- *Pakistan or the Partition of India*
- *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables; Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*
- *Ambedkar as member of the Governor General's Executive Council, 1942–46*
- *The Buddha and his Dhamma*
- *Unpublished Writings; Ancient Indian Commerce; Notes on laws; Waiting for a Visa ; Miscellaneous notes, etc.*
- *Ambedkar as the principal architect of the Constitution of India* [12]
- (2 parts) *Dr. Ambedkar and The Hindu Code Bill*
- *Ambedkar as Free India's First Law Minister and Member of Opposition in Indian Parliament* (1947–1956)
- *The Pali Grammar*

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Vol. 5, Issue 8, August 2016

- Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution – Struggle for Human Rights. Events starting from March 1927 to 17 November 1956 in the chronological order; Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution – Socio-political and religious activities. Events starting from November 1929 to 8 May 1956 in the chronological order; Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution – Speeches. (Events starting from 1 January to 20 November 1956 in the chronological order.)[13]

REFERENCES

1. Sabha, Rajya. "Alphabetical List of All Members of Rajya Sabha Since 1952". Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Archived from the original on 9 January 2010. Serial Number 69 in the list
2. ^ "Attention BJP: When the Muslim League rescued Ambedkar from the 'dustbin of history'". Firstpost. 15 April 2010
3. ^ "संविधान सभा". Rajyasabhaahindi.nic.in. Retrieved 4 February 2001
4. ^ Keer, Dhananjay (1971). Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission. Popular Prakashan. ISBN 978-8171542376 – via Google Books.
5. ^ Jaffrelot, Christophe (2005). Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers. p. 5. ISBN 1850654492.
6. ^ Khairmode, Changdev Bhawanrao (1985). Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Vol. 7) (in Marathi). Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskruti Mandal, Matralaya. p. 245.
7. ^ Jaffrelot, Christophe (2005). Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers. pp. 76–77. ISBN 978-1850654490.
8. ^ Khairmode, Changdev Bhawanrao (1985). Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Vol. 7) (in Marathi). Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskruti Mandal, Matralaya. p. 273.
9. ^ "13A. Dr. Ambedkar in the Bombay Legislature Part I". Archived from the original Retrieved 21 September 2011
10. ^ <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/1920s.html> Archived 17 December 2001
11. ^ Sengupta, Debjani (26 August 2006). "An Informal Guide to the Ambedkar National Memorial in Delhi". TheWire.in. The Wire.
12. ^ "The official Website of Dr. Ambedkar International Center- DAIC". Archived from the original on 14 April 2010
13. ^ Buswell, Robert Jr; Lopez, Donald S. Jr., eds. (2013). Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 34. ISBN 978-0691157863.
14. ^ Jaffrelot, Christophe (2005). Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 2. ISBN 0-231-13602-1.
15. ^ Pritchett, Frances. "In the 1890s" (PHP). Archived from the original on 7 September 2006. Retrieved 2 August 2006.