

# Ideas of Dr. BR. Ambedkar

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was exceptional in many respects- as an intellectual, a politician and human being. He fought many odds to become one of the greatest men of historical era. But he did not work in isolation. His ideas were shaped by his immediate surroundings. While mainstream nationalism was pitted against freedom from British rule, Ambedkar emphasized that real freedom can come only if Hindu society reorganize itself on casteless basis. His concept of social justice was wide and talked not only about the emancipation of Dalits but included the question of women as well. His ideas focused on internal restructuring of the Indian society. Analyzing the views of Ambedkar in relation to the freedom struggle opens many areas of enquiry- a distinct trajectory of social justice as elucidated by Ambedkar, his contribution in bringing caste to the public sphere in opposition to the views of mainstream nationalism where caste was mainly relegated to the private sphere of life. It was feared by mainstream nationalists that raising the issue of caste in public sphere can proved to be divisive and hence their approach towards the idea of social justice was not very revolutionary in nature.

This paper builds a critical study of the Indian state, tracing its evolution from the era of freedom struggle to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seeing it through the paradigm of Ambedkar's views. It explores the various facets of the ideology of Ambedkar. Each of the terrain of enquiry forms the subsection of paper. The paper also attempts to analyze that why the ideas of Ambedkar still hold so much relevance and how much Indian state is successful in keeping up with the spirit of constitution, major contributions in which come from Ambedkar and various lacunae suffered by Indian state in understanding the philosophy of Ambedkar.

Keywords: Freedom struggle, Constitution, Dalits

## **AMBEDKAR'S NATIONALISM: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND REVOLUTION**

*"...the untouchables have not joined the freedom struggle not because they are the tools of British imperialism but because they fear that the freedom of India social, ideological (without the minimum requisite, social, ideological change) will establish Hindu domination which was sure to close to them and forever all prospects of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and that they will be made the hewers of wood and drawers of water"<sup>1</sup>.*

Generally, nationalism is perceived as the dichotomous relation between the British colonialists and the Indian nationalists. However, instead of seeing it as contrasting image of black and white it should be taken notice

that Indian freedom struggle was ridden with conflicts even from inside. The Indian national movement was far from being monolithic and was marked by the heterogeneity of ideas. Among the many voices which make a sharp distinction from the mainstream nationalists ideas one voice is that of Dr. Ambedkar.

The Indian national struggle was not only to secure freedom from British rule but was also to lay the foundations of the modern Indian state. In this regard, Ambedkar's struggle 'constituted a part of the internal struggle of a nation-in-making, one of the divergent and sometimes conflicting currents all of which helped to secure 'freedom' – from external and internal oppression and enslavement. Without Ambedkar's opposition to mainstream nationalism, the process of internal consolidation of the nation would not have been carried out sufficiently enough to strengthen and broaden the social base of Indian nationalism'<sup>2</sup>.

The major point of contention between Indian National Congress and Ambedkar was the issue of approach towards the elimination of caste system. According to Ambedkar, 'the congress...regards the freedom of India from the British imperialism to be the be-all and end-all of Indian nationalism'. But according to Ambedkar gaining freedom from the clutches of British imperialism has other dimensions as well- the internal restructuring of the society is equally important, as he points out, 'it would be creating another imperialism', that of caste. Ambedkar's intellectual and political engagement with the caste and his complex relationship with the colonial state knock the bottom off the argument that Indian national movement was anything near to being monolithic in nature. His ideology and writings rupture the image of pan-Indian nationalism. Ambedkar's version of nationalism followed different trajectory to move towards freedom. His priority was the revolution in indigenous society. The difference in his opinion also stems from the fact that he considered caste and nationalism to be diametrically opposite from

1- Ambedkar, B.R., *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. IX, Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra, p.170-73

2- Gaikwad, S.M., *Ambedkar and Indian Nationalism*, EPW, Vol.33, March 1998, p.515-518

each other. According to him, they are divided into mutually exclusive spheres and are 'constructed on two mutually opposed principles of social organization'. The three characteristics, which Ambedkar found operative within caste- exclusivism, gradedness and rigidity- meet their opposite in the three virtues of fraternity, equality and liberty as functional and foundational for any nation<sup>3</sup>. He puts it clearly that 'nation is a democracy, a mode of associated living, of conjoined communicated experience' and caste due to its inherent nature of insulation is incompatible with the ideology of the nation. Linked to the attack against the caste system is his idea of the ideal social order. Ambedkar's ideal society is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. An ideal society should be varied, mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interest consciously communicated and shared. In other words, there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name of democracy.

It is a known fact that the colonial state by and large did not wish to disturb the social status quo and hence it legitimized the caste system through various ways. The congress party dominated by the upper castes challenged caste system but initially it was not willing to take up the problem of untouchability. It recognized 'caste as a social problem for the first time in 1917 when the leaders realized that with separate electorates to the depressed classes, they (caste Hindus) would be in minority'<sup>4</sup>. The problem was taken up because of political exigency at that time and not because of any far sighted approach towards the elimination of caste system. His views on caste and untouchability have to be seen in relationship with his vision for future social order and the role of state. Ambedkar has spelled out his main theses on caste and untouchability in his speech *annihilation of castes*

### 'ANNIHILATION OF CASTES'

Ambedkar's views on caste have been shaped by the hardships he faced as a result of being born an untouchable during the early years of his life and the legacy of Mahars in general. The gaining

3- Shah, Ghanshyam, 'Caste and Untouchability: Theory and Practice' in Sukhdeo Thorat (ed.), *Ambedkar In Retrospect*, IIDS, New Delhi, 2007, p.227  
4- *ibid.*, p.223

of economic advantage, some political recognition and educational facilities during his adulthood fueled his frustration over the imbalance between religious development on one hand and modernization of occupation and political structure on the other.

**Annihilation of caste** is a famous undelivered speech subsequently published by Dr. Ambedkar. The cancellation of the conference is owed to the Reception committee of the Annual conference of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal for 1936 on the ground that '*linking caste to Hindu religious tenets and calling for their destruction if caste is to be eradicated is unbearable to the conference.*'<sup>5</sup>

The speech best sums up Ambedkar's views on caste. In this paper, the speech has been taken up in detail because the speech analyses various dimensions associated with the caste system. His aversion for casteism and Hinduism in particular is reflected in the initial few lines of his speech where he sarcastically expresses his concern for the difficulties that the Mandal might face for inviting an *Antyaja* – an untouchable 'to address an audience of *Savarnas* as the *Shastras* do not permit a Hindu to accept anyone other than a Brahmin as his GURU merely because he is well versed. He goes on further to state that the only reason for his involvement in the conference is the cause of social reform and his 'perceived role in its furtherance'.

Ambedkar envisaged congruity of the political reform with the social reform. For Ambedkar no permanent progress in other fields of activity is possible without social efficiency. He blamed the evil customs prevalent in Hindu society for the state of inefficiency and put forward the need of ceaseless efforts to eradicate these evils. Ambedkar was right in his argument that social reform in India has 'few friends and many critics'. The

critics were divided into two distinct classes – one of political reformers and other of socialists<sup>6</sup>. Dr. Ambedkar traces the development of these two critics over the years into NATIONAL CONGRESS and SOCIAL CONFERENCE respectively. While congress addressed the weak points in the political organization of the country, the Social Conference defined the weak points in the social organization of Hindu society. Initially ‘they worked as two wings of one common activity but soon it manifested into two parties, a Political Reform Party and a Social Reform Party’<sup>7</sup>. These two bodies became

5- Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Critical Quest, 2007, p.3

6- *ibid.*, p.4

7- *ibid.*, p.4

hostile on the issue whether social reform should precede political reform. Majority of educated Hindus were for political advancement and indifferent to social reform. National Congress had large number of attendants and even larger number of sympathizers as compared to the Social Conference. In course of time the party in favor of political reform surpassed the Social conference. Also the indifferent attitude of Congress toward social reform is glaringly reflected in the statement by W.C. Bonnerjee – *“I for one have no patience with those who saw we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two...are we not fit for political reform because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? Because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends? Because we do not send our daughters to oxford and Cambridge?”*<sup>8</sup>

Taking the contemporary examples of atrocities faced by ‘untouchables in places like Kavitha, Chakwara and by communities like Balais of central India’<sup>9</sup>, Dr. Ambedkar raised the question to political minded Hindus *‘whether one is deemed fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like untouchables to use public schools, wells, streets or allow them to wear ornaments or to eat any food they like... Every congressman who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class.’*

He attributed the failure of Social Reform Party to its limited scope to the reform in Hindu family and its inability and unwillingness to approach social reform in the sense of reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. He says, *‘Suppose for the sake of argument that by some freak of fortune a revolution does take place and the socialists come in power, will they not have to deal with the problems created by the particular social order prevalent in India? I don’t see how a socialist state in India can function for a second without having to grapple with the problems created by the prejudices which make Indian people observe the distinctions high and low, clean and unclean’.*

According to Gail Omvedt, for Ambedkar, caste is an autonomous social institution that

8- *ibid.*, p.59- *ibid.*, p.7

exercises an important determining influence on other social institutions. It is not simply a part of the superstructure or a secondary, cultural institution, but a basic factor in socio historical development. Caste involves economic exploitation and political domination, but it is not primarily an economic or political institution. Ambedkar was insistent that the essence of caste was linked to the endogamy, to the maintenance of a closed social group. According to Ambedkar this also helps in understanding how limited was the victory of National Congress was over Social Conference. Ambedkar further said, “*political reform cannot with impunity take precedence over social reform in the sense of reconstruction of society is a thesis which, I am sure, cannot be controverted.*” He strongly advocated destruction in belief of sanctity of Vedas. He maintained that social and religious revolutions are a pre condition for political revolution. He said ‘*the emancipation of the mind and soul is a necessary for the political expansion of people*’.

But that does not mean he believed political transformation has no meaning without political and social revolution. What he emphasized is that ‘the process of social and religious transformation needed to be initiated and be on agenda along with the process of political revolution’<sup>10</sup>. He asked Dalits to leave Hindu religion and to adopt Buddhism. To Ambedkar, ‘annihilation of untouchability was basically a problem of social, political and economic equality’<sup>11</sup>. He frequently asked untouchables to organize, educate and agitate for political power. In 1933, he asked his fellow untouchables:

*You have now a way of bringing about change, an improvement in your life conditions. That way is through political action, through appropriate laws....you can make government provide for you what you are now denied- food, clothing, shelter, education....hence, instead of resorting to rosary counting or prayer, you should now depend on the political path; that will bring you liberation...the conflict hereafter will not be between the British and the Indians, but between the advanced classes of India and the backward class. No borrowed or hired person who does not belong to your class can further your welfare by the least degree. You must rid yourselves of internal divisions and organize strongly.*<sup>12</sup>

10- Shah, Ghanshyam, *Op.cit.*, p.22711- Shah, Ghanshyam, *Op.cit.*, p.22812- Quoted in Shah, Ghanshyam, *Op. cit.*, p.228

For him political constitution has value and permanence only when they accurately express those conditions of force which exist in practice within a society. He draws historical precedence from all over the world and even from India such as social revolution of Buddha preceding political revolution of Chandragupta, social revolution of Guru Nanak preceding political revolution of Sikhs etc to substantiate his argument. “*Emancipation of the mind and soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of people*” rightly sums up his argument for precedence of social reform over political reform. Socialists of India following their

fellows in Europe preached that political and social reforms are but gigantic illusions and that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform. Dr. Ambedkar again used illustrations from history of India, where *'the priest holds sway over a common man often greater than the magistrate, to show that social status of an individual by itself becomes a source of power and authority'*<sup>13</sup>.

Ambedkar recognizes the need of a revolution in order to bring economic reform contemplated by the socialists. But he also recognizes the need of a deeper assurance among the proletariat than just of a socialist leader, the assurance of the mental attitude of compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity. It will be apt to quote Ambedkar that *"turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political or economic reform unless you kill this monster."* Defenders of caste system have put forward the ground of division of labor as basis of caste system in its defense, as it is a need of every civilized society. But Ambedkar argued that along with *'division of labor, division of laborers into watertight compartments'*<sup>14</sup> also occurs. Indian caste system violates the principle that an individual should choose his career in accordance to his competency. Also by not permitting readjustment of occupations, caste becomes a direct cause of much unemployment in the country. Individual sentiment and preference have been replaced by the dogma of predestination. *"As an economic organization caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as, it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to exigencies of social rules."*<sup>15</sup>

13- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit*, p.13

14- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit*, p.14

15- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit*, p.14

Another way of justifying the caste is through linking it to the notions of purity. Caste and eugenics is another facet through which the support is provided to the prevalence of caste system. Even biological sciences have been deployed to maintain the perpetualness of the caste system. Caste as a *'tool of maintaining purity of race and blood has been touted as a defense in favor of its existence'*<sup>16</sup>. Ambedkar used science to defy the false science behind this argument. Now ethnologists are of the opinion that the man of pure race exists nowhere in the world. Further Ambedkar mentions that, *'caste system came into being long after the different races has comingled in its blood and culture and that it is a social division of people of the same race'*<sup>17</sup>. Showing that caste system does not embody the eugenics of modern scientists, Ambedkar defines it as a social system that embodies arrogance & selfishness of a perverse section of Hindus.

He shows that existence of Hindu society is just a myth. Ambedkar blamed caste for disorganizing and demoralizing the Hindus. For him Hindu society is a myth and does not exist as such. It is just a collection of castes. For Ambedkar there is no Hindu consciousness and the consciousness that exists in every Hindu is that



of his caste. Ambedkar was against the view that there is a fundamental unity underlying the apparent diversity. He accepts the similarity between habits and customs, beliefs & thoughts, but that does not mean that Hindus constitute a society. As per Ambedkar, to have similar things is totally different from possessing things in common, and mere similarity in things is not enough to constitute a society. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the “*caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from being a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being.*”<sup>18</sup> The anti-social spirit running in the veins of the body of caste system is one of its worst features.

Ambedkar cites instances in Hindu literature containing caste genealogies in which attempts are made to give a noble origin to one caste and an ignoble origin to other castes. This anti social

16- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit.*, p.15

17- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit.*, p.16

18- Ambedkar, B.R., *op.cit.*, p.19

spirit has led to poisoning of mutual relations between the sub-castes as well. The anti-social spirit exists wherever one group has interest of its own marked as above the others. Caste system also prevents solidarity among different castes by keeping the memories of past feuds alive and green. It has limited the scope of public charity, made public opinion impossible, virtue and morality has become caste ridden. The ability to follow a leader or even appreciate the merits of a fellow man has been limited to caste boundaries.

After much criticism of the existing caste system, Ambedkar turned towards the constructive side of the problem and suggested an ideal society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Fraternity for Ambedkar is characterized by communication. He emphasized the need of social endosmosis that will make the society mobile and this for Ambedkar is ‘*democracy which is primarily a mode of associated living rather than just a form of government*’. The liberty contemplated by Ambedkar also includes the liberty to choose one’s profession.

He designates *Chaturvarna* as a miserable failure and criticizes Gandhi’s point of view as well. In his article, ‘*Who Were the Shudras*’ Ambedkar says that there was no separate *shudra varna* in the early Indo-Aryan society. ‘Owing to contestation between shudra kings and Brahmins and refusal to perform upanayana by Brahmins led to the degradation of shudras who were at that time had social status equal to the kshatriyas, thus they fell below the rank of vaishyas and came to form the fourth varna. Later, the brahmanical hindu religion by evolving the purity pollution concept treated some sections of shudras as untouchables who were competing with Brahmins. By the fourth century as brahmanical orthodoxy took firm stand cow slaughter became a punishable offence’<sup>19</sup>. This was a reaction against Buddhism. According to Ambedkar, hatred for Buddhism, coupled with contempt for beef eating, were the reasons for making these people untouchable. Caste was legitimized with divine basis and religious sanction through shastras.

It is based on the doctrine that men are created from the different parts of divinity. The four classes are not on the horizontal plane, different but equal. They are on vertical plane not only different but also unequal in status, one standing above the other. He traces that how religious

19-Ambedkar, B.R., Writings and Speeches, Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra, Vol.7. p.9- 18

connotations spill over to the moral and legal sphere as well. This order of precedence among the classes is not merely conventional. It is spiritual, moral and legal.

Ambedkar was critical of the Arya Samajists alternative to caste system i.e. CHATURVARNA or the division of society into four classes based not on birth but on guna (worth). The main criticism for such division is that of labeling associated with it. The names – *Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaishya and Shudra* are associated with definite and fixed notion of hierarchy based on birth in the mind of every Hindu. The presumption of successful categorization of people into four definite classes became another reason for its criticism. Since the individual qualities are variable, pigeon holing of men into four definite classes is bound to fail. Without the presence of a penal sanction, the ideal of CHATURVARNA is impossible to be realized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also the absence of clarity regarding the position of women made CHATURVARNA, an unrealistic alternative to the existing caste system.

After contemplating about the ideal society, Ambedkar proposed a way forward to abolish caste system. For him “*anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole*”. One of the existing remedy of caste system proposed a series of affirmative steps starting from eradication of sub caste and gradually moving towards complete annihilation. But there is a danger that the process may stop at abolition of sub castes leading to more powerful and mischievous castes. Another plan of action suggested inter-caste dinners but Ambedkar was convinced that “*The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste*”<sup>20</sup>. Ambedkar was convinced with the need of a notional change in order to successfully vanquish caste. Ambedkar blamed religion for the peoples’ adamant belief in caste. In order to break away from the shackles of the shastras, there is a need to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras.

His conversion to Buddhism opens up many terrains of study about his ideas. Since the advent of Indian renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there have been a number of failed attempts by the so called “untouchables” to mobilize their social status and bring it at par with the mainstream Hindus. When Ambedkar rose to popularity, the anti-untouchability movement was at its youth. On October 13, 1935, he attended the Bombay presidency depressed classes conference where he

20- Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste.*, op.cit., p.36



made the first definite announcement to leave Hinduism. In his address, he displayed his utter dissatisfaction with Hinduism stating “*I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. However it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power*”. He advised “untouchables” to present a united front to the outside world and suggested them to embrace other religions if their disabilities were not lifted soon. Till now the problems of the untouchables have been looked upon through the eyes of an outsider looking with pity; Ambedkar looked from within. For Ambedkar, to remain in Hinduism and to attempt to abolish caste system is like sweetening poison. After the public announcement of need of a new religion by untouchables, representatives from different sects and faiths approached Ambedkar. Ambedkar rejected the offer of Christians because “*the mass conversions have generally lowered Christian standards so badly as to have left for the Indian church a legacy of deplorable caste prejudices and jealousies*”<sup>21</sup>.

Although, Ambedkar never sought out Islam as a religion for himself, he did give hints of possible merger of untouchables into Islam. Later on he reiterated the possibility of untouchables becoming Muslims on the basis of the great Hindu-Muslim divide in India. Sikhism was the most probable choice for the replacement religion. The valorous image of Sikhism along with no loss of patriotism and the possibility of separate electorate acted in favor of Sikhism becoming the most obvious choice. However, things went wrong while Ambedkar was in London due to the disagreement on certain issues between Ambedkar and the Sikh mission authorities. Also the realization of the possible irreparable damage to Hinduism acted against Sikhism as the choice. After the Yeola statement, Ambedkar received telegraph from the *mahabodhi sabha*, Benaras granting equal status to converts. Loknatha – an Italian Buddhist monk played a crucial role in making Buddhism a successful alternative to Hinduism. He mentioned in his booklet “*there is no caste in Buddhism! Therefore become Buddhist and thereby raise your status*”<sup>22</sup>. Loknath’s statement about untouchables formerly being Buddhists formed the basis of Ambedkar’s book –

21- Zelliott, Eleanor, *Ambedkar’s Conversion*, Critical Quest, 2005, p.15

22- Zelliott, Eleanor, *op.cit.*, p.16

THE UNTOUCHABLES. Ambedkar’s praises of Buddhism came much later after 1950s. He even drew comparisons between traditions of Buddhism and 14<sup>th</sup> century Mahar poet saint Cokhamela.

The conversion ceremony took place in Nagpur in October 1956. After conversion, Ambedkar stated that “*I feel as if I had left hell*”<sup>23</sup>. After the conversion, Ambedkar mentioned three needs necessary for revival of Buddhism in India – a Buddhist bible, a dedicated body of monks and support from Buddhist countries. Due to his death shortly after his conversion, he was able to fulfill only one of the above mentioned needs. ‘*The Buddha and His Dhamma*’ was published in 1957. With the acceptance of Buddhism by Ambedkar and his followers, Buddhism came forward as a moral religion, a religion of equality, which is respected in the world.

Gail Omvedt in his article ‘Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India’ says that ‘the elites expressed an ideology of what may be described as the “national revolution”, if we define nationalism as

opposition to western colonial rule and remember that it was a nationalism of a class combining bourgeois and high caste traditions'. Though he talks in context of Phule and remarks that Phule represented the ideology of the social revolution in its earliest form, but the same goes true for Ambedkar as well. Omvedt remarks, "Phule represented the ideology of the social revolution in its earliest form, with a peasant and anti caste outlook which saw its primary enemy as that very elite – and it is, in a sense, one of the tragic dilemmas of the colonial situation that the national revolution and the social revolution in a colonized society tend to develop apart from one another."<sup>24</sup>

### AMBEDKAR'S RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Revisiting Ambedkar's ideas in contemporary scenario has become very important. If Indians by and large have accepted the new constitutional regime of the independent nation state and continue to both abide by the idea of equal citizenship and respect the rule of law, then why do

23- Zelliott, Eleanor, *op.cit.*, p.25

24- Omvedt, Gail, *Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2004, p.4-5

caste prejudice, caste violence and social inequality based on caste hierarchy persist in such a rampant way. Whether through his conflict with Gandhi, or his rejection of Hinduism and adoption of Buddhism; whether through his work on the making of the constitution and his creation of the basic outlines of a reservation policy, or 'as a believer in associational forms of collective life, fraternity, equal citizenship and fundamental rights- in all respects, Ambedkar suggested the way forward to a more egalitarian, democratic, and enlightened society than India has ever been'. Ambedkar is very relevant today as he laid the idea that political democracy without social democracy and economic equality is void. Today even after reservations for them the truth is that backward classes are widely discriminated against. 'Ambedkar was concerned not only with formal political power and democracy. Political democracy- the right to vote and hold office- cannot be sustained for long without social democracy and economic equality'<sup>25</sup>. He observed in his final address to the constituent assembly:

*We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy...on the 26 January 1950; we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. 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.*<sup>26</sup>

The constitution of India takes cognizance for the need of social reform and introduced various

25- Shah, Ghanshyam, *op.cit.*, p.229

26- Ambedkar, B.R., *Writings and Speeches, Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra, 1994*

laws- article 17 of the constitution specifies that untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Untouchability is not defined but another laws stipulates that no citizen, on ground of caste, should be subject to restriction with regard to (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainments (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public. Several laws were promulgated like the untouchability offences act 1955. It was amended in 1976 and rechristened as civil rights act. The 1950 constitution also introduced new realms in the era of positive discrimination. The most ambitious innovation that was common to all the domains was regarding the principle of proportionality. Reservations in favor of Dalits and adivasi in the education system, in the public sector and in the assemblies, had to be proportional to their percentage in society.<sup>27</sup>

In India, political activities of a party emerged as the tool for social reform as well. In this regard, it is important to investigate the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party that represents the untouchable castes (Scheduled Castes or Dalits) in India. During the 1990s, the BSP emerged as a major political force in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India. Established in 1984, BSP radically altered the political culture of North India. it has also been viewed by Cristophe Jaffrelot as the ‘silent revolution’- where the lower castes which has been marginalized for centuries is inducted into the democratic process so much so that one among them rises to become the head of the state.<sup>28</sup>

However, Sudha Pai in her work ‘Dalit Assertion and The Unfinished Democratic Revolution: Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh’ agree that it has transformed the political contours of the state but opines that ‘in comparison to radical Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra, BSP appears statist and conservative, interested only in grabbing political power and not in transforming stark poverty and backwardness in which majority of the Dalits live today...infact BSP’s political strategy has always been accommodative of other castes i.e. bahujan...they are particularly not

27- Jaffrelot, Cristophe, *Caste and Politics, India International Centre Quarterly, Vol.37, 2010.*

28- Jaffrelot, Cristophe, *India’s Silent Revolution: The Rise of Lower Castes in North India, London:Hurst and Company, 2003.*

anti caste...BSP used the caste instrumentally'.<sup>29</sup>

Indian state suffers from lacunae in understanding the philosophy of Ambedkar. It is important to analyze the way Ambedkar has been appropriated today. Why inspite of so many safeguards Dalits constitute the downtrodden section of society. Why inspite of the powerful movement initiated by him Dalits conversion to Buddhism is insignificant and even after conversion their social status continues to be low. These questions have become all the more relevant today. Untouchability though rooted in the notion of purity and pollution of the caste system has an economic dimension as well. It is not just an 'ideological and cultural phenomenon'. Whatever its origin, traditionally, it has been closely related with the material condition- division of labour, economic status and occupation.

Gail Omvedt argues that caste based discrimination and hierarchy does exist, but their nature is different from the past. Caste is no longer homogenous in terms of occupation and wealth. Stratification within most castes has developed during the last fifty years. Its endogamous character is changing in different clusters of castes though not at the same speed as that of economic differentiation. The political meaning of caste has changed traditional social boundaries and new formations are taking place. Though Indian state does not legitimize caste based discrimination in general and untouchability in particular, though the measures it has taken against the practice of untouchability and for the welfare of the deprived castes are half hearted and inadequate. At the same time, these measures, which are in response to the dalit movements, capitalist economic structure and competitive politics, have changed the nature of caste system and untouchability.

Gail Omvedt further argues that fight against hierarchy and dominance is mainly an economic and political fight, involving access to jobs through reservations, education, land and finally and necessarily political power. But the fight for annihilation of caste is a different matter in itself. Here, Ambedkar outlined the main points in his essay with that name: fighting against closure (endogamy) through inter caste marriages, and fighting the ideology that maintained this through the rejection of Brahmanic Hinduism and the taking up of religion of equality. The problem that

*29- Pai, Sudha, Dalit Assertion and The Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, Sage, 2002*

this fight has not been fully successful till the present, that inspite of gradually increasing intermarriages, and conversion to various religions like Buddhism and Christianity, shows the persistence of the system. Since 'it was not simply dalits that created the system, the conversion and rejection of Brahmanism only by dalits is probably insufficient. Brahmins have to become equal partners with the dalits in abolishing the caste system.'

Also the issue of reservations for backward castes which is much controversial today can be traced back to the Ambedkar. However, the divergences between Mandal and Ambedkar are significant as analysed by Dipankar Gupta.

Mandal commission was set up to investigate the extent of educational and social backwardness among various sections of Indian society and to recommend the ways of identifying these backward classes. Central government appointed this commission in 1978 and the commission was named after its chairperson B.P. Mandal. Commission gave its report in 1980 and advised that 'backward classes' should be understood to mean backward castes. Since many castes, other than scheduled castes, were also treated as low in caste hierarchy. Commission did a survey and found that backward classes have a very low presence in both educational institutions and in employment in public services. It therefore recommended reserving 27% of seats in educational institutions and government jobs for these groups. It also made suggestion to introduce land reform programme to improve the condition of backward classes.

However, according to Dipankar Gupta, Ambedkar's programme envisions not only the removal of untouchability but also about creating assets among those who have none. The reservations in mandal scheme are devoid of this moral connotation. The 'targeted beneficiaries of Ambedkar are not without socially valuable assets. They are unwilling to merge their existing tangible assets into a collective pool as their express purpose is to convert one kind of asset into the other. Caste in the case of Mandal commission is an important political resource and does not match with the ideals of fraternity as was envisaged by the Ambedkar.'<sup>30</sup>

30- Gupta, Dipankar, *Positive Discrimination and the Question of Fraternity: Contrasting Ambedkar and Mandal on Reservations*, EPW, Vol.32, 1997, p.1971

## CONCLUSION

Ambedkar's notion of nationalism and his opposition to mainstream nationalism has wide ranging ramifications. Today Ambedkar is a strong cultural symbol and important rallying factor in the post independent politics. But the persistence of caste, anomaly in the Indian state and the recent debate that Ambedkar can be appropriated by the Dalits only opens up many new vistas of field of enquiry. Also it traces the trajectory of the India state and its inability to grasp the philosophy of Ambedkar. Caste as an issue remains relevant, the politics around it has gone changes with the time but till today the political mobilization is not able to tilt the class balance in favor of marginalized classes. Till the time Indian state grapples with the complex issue of caste and its repercussions on democracy, the ideas of Ambedkar remains much relevant.

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