



Dr. Ambedkar on Individual Freedom and Social Reform

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Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy is the guiding principle and as well as a movement aiming at the well-being of the down trodden people, deprives and the destitute. The root of his philosophy lies in the Indian society as he himself is the sufferer of that system. It comes to us as a revolt against Indian society.

His protest was not a new one. It was started early in the Vedic period by seers like Buddha and Mahavira. They stood against the unjust social system of Hindus. Buddha broke down the barriers of caste system and preached the equality of all mankind. He welcomed the lower caste persons in his Dhamma and makes them respectable members in his Bhikku Sangha. Mahavira also launched a revolt against inequality, traditionalism and orthodoxy. All these examples of the revolt against unjust social systems are directly connected to the individual freedom.

He was a staunch supporter of freedom of thought. His main emphasis was on the urgency of improving the social condition of the needy and the poor. His thought was mostly concentrated on social reform. The social area is the most important aspect of his philosophy because man can hardly be alienated from the social situation of his time and place of whatever nature, man is involved in it, and he has to live in it and struggle in favour or against the elements of the field. In this paper I want to express the view of Dr. Ambedkar on individual freedom and social reform.

Key words: Freedom of man, Othodoxy, Destitute, Depressed classes, Annihilation, Caste system, class-hatred, Ideal society.

Introduction: Dr. Ambedkar wanted a philosophy to be both a theory and a practice. To him philosophy has no meaning if it has no practical potentialities. It is also directly connected to the problems of life. So any theory propounded by philosophy must return to society as an instrument to reform the human society.

The philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar is the guiding principle and as well as a movement aiming at the well-being of the lowly and the weak, the deprived and the destitute. The roots of his philosophy lie in the Indian society as he himself is the sufferer of that system. It comes to us as a revolt against Indian society.

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Dr. Ambedkar was a staunch supporter of freedom of thought. His main emphasis was on the urgency of improving the social condition of the needy and the poor. His thought was mostly concentrated on social reform. The social area is the most important aspect of his philosophy because man can hardly be alienated from the social situation of his time and place of whatever nature, man is involved in it, and he has to live in it and struggle in favour or against the elements of the field. In this paper I want to express the view of Dr. Ambedkar on individual freedom and social reform. Which one does he prefer? Is individual freedom more significant than social order?

The relation between Individual and Society: It is true that, the society does not provide all facilities to the individual rather individuals have to fight against the unjust social system. It is also true that an individual is not separated from the social system. The social philosophy emphasizes on “the social unity of mankind and seeks to interpret the significance of the special aspects of human life with reference to that unity”¹ It refers to the philosophical justification of value positions relevant to that unity of mankind. It is in the society that an individual is surrounded and encompassed by culture, a societal force. It is in the society again that he has to conform to the norms, occupy status and become members of group.

The society suggests ideals and values which could bind the people together for some common purpose. The question of the relationship between the individual and society is connected with the question of the relationship of man and society. There are two theories regarding the relationship of man and society. One is ‘Organismic theory’ and the other is ‘Social contract theory’. According to ‘Organismic theory’ man is a social animal. He lives in social groups in communities and in society. Human life and society almost go together.

Man cannot live without society. Man is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in groups, in society. Society has become an essential condition for human life to arise and to continue. It is true that, Ambedkar never

¹ Machenzie, J.S. *Outlines of Social Philosophy*, 1918, p-14.

saw man apart from society, but he wants to give special preference to man than the society. According to him, the dignity of man, protection of equal right, freedom of expression, right relations based on fraternity, man's all round development, man's liberty to express himself, are some of the main qualities of the individuals are accepted. Therefore, an individual has an important role in Ambedkar's philosophy.

The Social contract theory, which was propounded by Rousseau admits the facts that, 'Man was born free; but everywhere he is in chains'. In society there are many pressures and limitations which suppressed the freedom of man. When man lived in natural conditions he had to face a number of discomforts and disturbances and in the midst of calamities. It was a general situation for all. Hence to get rid of such situation individuals assembled and made a Social contract and they agree to live under some sort of administration in order to safeguard their life and property. But that contract proved unjust, when the state power goes in the hands of a single person. Rousseau was not satisfied and he wanted to abolish the unjust society and negotiate a new satisfactory social contract in order to re-establish a new social order.

Politically, in Rousseau's view, the people are all in all; the entire power is vested in their hands; it can not be vested in one person or class; all men are free and equal; and the main function of the administration is to protect the rights of every individual. The sovereignty of the state is vested in people's desire which manifests itself in various laws of the state. Individuals think over the laws out of their good will. Although they appear to be in bonds, yet in reality, they are free. On the basis of this theory French Revolution took place and they made a Constitution in August 1789. This theory advocates the supreme power of an individual because a man has the right to acquire his living by his own choice. Similarly Ambedkar also admits that respect for the free-will of every individual should be the cornerstone of every social order.

According to Ambedkar self determination is the essence of human existence. His main emphasis is on the pursuing of one's profession by one's own choice, which is the essence of individual liberty. This principle of ideal society resembles what Bertrand Russell call the principle of "growth," It is not only mere material goods that man need, but more freedom, more self-direction more outlet for creativeness , more opportunity for the joy of life, more voluntary co-operation , and less involuntary subservience to purposes not their own"²

Ambedkar applies the above principle for social reconstruction particularly the Hindu Society. His democratic mind and scientific attitude found in the traditional Hindu theory of *Varnasram*-which degenerated in the present caste system-a complete denial of the liberty, equality and fraternity of man. He wants to reconstruct the society which will not exist on the basis of the four *varnas* or castes but on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

These principles are not limited only to the political issues by political parties then it will be meaningless for an individual. This principle carry "a meaning beyond political context and is more significant in the context of

² Russell,B.,*Principles of Social Reconstruction*,1954,pp-11-12.

individual and family”³. But question arises how do we apply these principles in the life of an individual? For example, Dr. Ambedkar, an individual man excelled himself in the areas of education and knowledge. According to him ‘Being educated’ does not mean merely achieving the educational degrees, but it also means keeping oneself well-informed about the condition, difficulties and problems of one’s own and that of his caste and family. Ambedkar, after having organized his self or personality started his fight against those social evils. It is the individual effort of Ambedkar which helped him after making his personality disciplined, and he reached the higher level of agitation, he went beyond his self, family and caste limitations, and thus he could guide the entire race of mankind.

Lord Buddha was another example of an individual who not only got proper education and training, but also kept himself well-informed about the prevailing conditions of his times. He realized the suffering of human and knew the poverty of human situation. He then left his home in order to seek a solution to the malice he found around his environment. After a long individual effort, ultimately he succeeded his struggle against evil forces and become enlightened, the Buddha. He made his personality well-organized and balanced and fought against all those destructive tendencies which prevented him from achieving his aim.

The main idea of individuality that we could derive from the above two instances of Dr. Ambedkar and the Buddha. According to them a crowd of evil thoughts and evil passions always forcibly try to enter the mind of an individual who wished to do something great for mankind and thus individuals are frightened lest they should crush the individual purpose. Both the personalities knew that in the battle with evil passions, an individual could be succumbed, An individual having faith and courage fought against the evil passions and overcome the situation. The life stories of Ambedkar and Buddha inspired us to fight against evil passion with individual effort. As the decision for fight against the evil passion which comes at first in the mind of an individual.

Ambedkar gave a prominent place to the individual freedom in the scheme of human affairs. Individual freedom is the central force of any revolution. An individual must be educated for his conditions and problems. Well-educated means well-organized of an individual to fight against evil forces. Ambedkar organized his own self. He controlled his body and mind and made himself a strong man, a man of word and actions. He did not let his mind go astray. Had he not made his mind disciplined and got his senses controlled, he would have lost himself in the midst of charms and joys of the big cities of America, England and Germany. There he had gone only for getting higher education. The colourful life of these countries would have attracted him, but it did not happen, for he knew, he had to fight for his own existence, for the emancipation of the depressed classes and for the freedom of his country.

The quality of an individual is that he must be well-educated, reasonable, courageous, disciplined, honest, and morally sound in himself. He possesses an enlightened personality which inspires other individuals for doing

³ Jatava, Dr. D.R., *Ambedkar and Humanism*, ABD Publishers, Jaipur, 1999, p-48

some good works in the interest of the many. Dr. Ambedkar having well-known about the prevailing conditions of society, endeavors to solve them through peaceful and constitutional method. He wants to remove the harmful tradition of the society to save the miserable life of the depressed classes in particular and aimed at bringing about a social revolution in India. In order to fulfill this task he began to reconstruct the Hindu society. He opposed to the Varna system and the caste system. I, therefore, refer to his views on the points cited above.

Annihilation of the Varna system: The origin of Caste system is based on the *Purusa- sukta*, a part of the Rig- Veda. Later on, the Hindus upheld it on the ground that it was “either the principle of choice of the duties, prescribed for any of the *Varnas*, or the principle of *Gunas*- the innate psychological disposition of man, determining his inclination towards one of the four broad groups of vocations and duties”.⁴ This system proved to be the best for conducting the society in those days. Afterwards there came the period of foreign slavery. During this long period *varna - vyawastha* was converted into a bad form of caste system. Dr. Ambedkar says that this new philosophic vindication is not an original one; it is taken from the Samkhya Philosophy, which holds that all mental and physical phenomena can be reduced to three *gunas*, i.e., Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. According to Ambedkar these three *gunas* are not stagnant but there is a tendency to gain supremacy over the other.

Dr. Ambedkar observes that each individual is made up of three *gunas* and there is a competition for dominance of one over the other. That is why Ambedkar rejected the theory of permanent *gunas* in one individual. So he asks that a particular *guna* in a particular individual, which at one time, say, at the time of his birth, happens to dominate for all time, till his death? Can there be the one *guna*, in the same degree, in a person from the beginning to the end of his life? According to Ambedkar there is no justification for assuming this type of theory of Varna system because all our experiences, mental states, as also the happenings of the nature are changeable.

Dr. Ambedkar believes that the nature of an individual is liable to change at every moment. Each *guna* changes, in accordance with time and circumstances. Therefore, he argues that if the *gunas* are ever changing, there can be no permanent and fixed system of social classification of man into *varnas*, and therefore, no permanent and fixed assignment of occupation. The theory of Chaturvarna is not acceptable for the reason that, man is always changing in the light of the three *gunas*, changing positions. In the opinion of Ambedkar, it denies individual freedom and equality –which are necessary condition for an associated living- the firm foundation of a civilized society. Hence, Ambedkar utterly annihilates the theory of Chaturvarna system in Hindu society.

Again, it is said that the *varna* system is but another name for the division of labour and if division of labour is necessary condition of every civilized society, then it is argued that there is nothing wrong with the social organization of Chaturvarna. But Ambedkar does not agree with this view because Varna system is not merely a division of labour, it is also a division of labourers.

⁴ Prabhu, P.N., *Hindu Social Organisation*, 1954, pp.340-341.

Moreover, this division of labour, is not in favour of individual freedom. He says that social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and make his own career. So, Individual freedom must not be suppressed. This principle is violated in the Varna system as it involves an attempt to allot tasks to individuals in advance selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the ‘social status’(or birth) of the parents⁵. The lack of freedom gives individual lesser chances to acquire efficiency and this inefficiency is always unfruitful to self development.

In the theory of Chaturvarna, the division of labour is not a division based on ‘Choice’. Dr Ambedkar observes that the individual sentiment is discarded in it because it is based on the dogma of “predestination”. From the view of social efficiency, the greatest evil in the Hindu social order is not so much the poverty and suffering that it involves, but the psychological tragedy of “hereditary callings”, which make no appeal to the conscience of those who are engaged in them. Such a Varna system provides no freedom to the individuals to change their occupation according to their choice.

The social stratification which is based on Varna system, according to Abmedkar, is not suited to the needs of the time. He observes that present industrial age undergoes rapid changes and with such changes, an individual must be free to change his occupation. Without such freedom to adjust him to changing circumstances, it would be impossible for him to gain his livelihood in a ‘complex industrial civilization.’⁶

Some have given the biological preferences in defense of the Varna system. It is said that the aim of Varna system is to preserve the purity of race or the purity of blood. Ambedkar does not agree with this view also. He says that ethnologists are now of opinion that man of pure race exist nowhere and that there has been a mixture of all races in all parts of the world. There is hardly a class in India, which has not a foreign strain in it.⁷ Radhakrishnan also recognized it by saying that “there has been a general infusion of foreign blood into the Hindu race and within the race itself; there has been a steady flow of blood from the Brahmin to the Candalas”.⁸ Therefore, Varna system does not demarcate any racial division; it is a social division of people of the same race only to preserve the status group, and not the purity of race or blood.

Again, some people arguing that Varna system are the best possible means for securing social stability. Assuming that it is true, Dr. Ambedkar finds fault with stability. According to him, every person should be anxious for social stability and for the best possible social adjustment, but not on the basis of static or fixed relationship for all times. He says that the stability is wanted but not at the sacrifice of social justice. So, this system does not provide new warmth of social relationship to the modern Indian society.

⁵ Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of caste*, 1944, p-20.

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⁷ Ibid, p-22

⁸ Radhakrishnan, S., *The Hindu View of life*, 1949, p-99

Ambedkar observes that certain names become fixed or associated with definite sentiments and attitudes of the people. Similarly, the names, *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *shudra* have become definitely associated with certain sentiments of high and low and are now based on birth rather than worth (guna). Ambedkar says if new ideas and ideals have meaning and value, those old names should be discontinued. If not then there can not be liberty and equality in the social relations of Hindus.

In order to reform the Hindu society the principles of individual freedom and Equality should be established in society. Ambedkar says that, until the destruction of the *varna* system and the caste system, it is impossible for the reorganization of the Hindu society. “In order to achieve this object (of Liberty Equality and Fraternity) the sense of religious sanctity behind caste and varne must be destroyed”⁹. Now we will explain how Ambedkar eliminated the caste system.

Elimination of the Caste System: The ancient Indian society was conducted by Varna system. Initially this system was not so bad. But after the period of foreign slavery it was gradually converted into a bad form of caste system. Then there arose a feeling of high and low in our social organization. So, now it is clear that “*Varna-Vyawastha* was the first form of caste system “. ¹⁰

Ambedkar was dissatisfied with the Varna system from the very beginning of his life. He himself was born in a lower caste and sufferer of that system. He learned from his bitter experiences that the improvement in the conditions of the lower caste people is a part of the wide movement for the foundation of a society based on equality. The foundation of society of free man and women will not be possible without the elimination of the caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted to abolish the caste system to reconstruct the society with the power of his reason and thought for the sake, he employed the political power also. He thought that the attack must have been made from all the side to fight with the caste system. According to him, caste is not a thing but it is a thought, a mental phenomena. Its roots lie in the holiness of the Shastras. So the real way is that each individual must be made free from the impact of the holiness of the shastras. Each mind should be wiped out of that feeling. Only than they will bring to an end the difference of caste feeling.

There is another view that the real way of abolishing castes is ‘inter-marriage’. Ambedkar was fully agreed with this view in principal. The ‘fusion of blood’ can alone create the feeling of kinship; this feeling will destroy the feeling of alienation-created by caste behaviour patterns. This close relationship based on ‘inter-marriage’ will induce the different castes to go in for ‘inter-dining’. That is why Ambedkar says that ‘inter-marriage’ is a remedy more effective than ‘inter-dining’ method. These two methods will evolve a common outlook of life and so a feeling of oneness will necessarily follow. As a result the caste feeling will decrease; it will practically bring them together.

⁹ Ambedkar, B. R, *Annihilation of caste*, Jalandhar, Bheempatrika, 1982, p-133.

¹⁰ Shiv Gajrani. S.Ram, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, Commonwealth Pub. 2006, p-323.

Dr. Ambedkar holds that the main cause of caste feeling is the existence of religious books, which arose the so called sacredness and divinity behind the *Varnas*. People believed in the sanctity of the *Shastras*. They will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the *Shastras*. Any new change, individual or social, according to Ambedkar, is a matter of reason and morality, and divinity once will be established, denies reason and morality, although it might be fouling human relationship. Ambedkar believed that if new social order based on reason and morality is to be brought about, then the divinity behind the caste will vanish.

Basic Principles of Ideal Society:

Ambedkar, in his ideal society give the supreme power of an individual. The free will of every individual must be maintained in an ideal society. The social order which is based on Varna or caste, suppressed the individual liberty, hence Ambedkar condemns such a social order. The principles on which Ambedkar's social order is existed are Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These principles are not derived from the slogan of the French–Revolution, but from the teachings of his master, the Buddha.

Buddha was one example of individual liberty who pursuing his own profession by his own choice. According to Ambedkar a man's power is dependent on his (a) Physical heredity, (b) Social endowment and (c) finally, on Individual efforts. Ambedkar emphasizes on the last one which gives as much incentive as possible to the full development of every one's power. All men ought to be given equal chances to develop and grow. Here the idea of liberty means all kinds of liberty- social, political and religious. Each and every individual must be treated as equal both socially and politically. It is based on the 'common good' principle. The function and structure of society will provide each individual to attain their equitable share in the fruits of social co-operation. Therefore, equal facilities and equal opportunities should be given to all, so as to enable them to participate in the effective social organization. This leads him to demand equality in the eye of the law, which he himself introduced in the Constitution of the India.

The meaning of fraternity means to show respect and reverence towards fellowmen. In an ideal society each and every individuals are equal in nature. No one is to be dominated by the other. They will be treated by the principle of 'love thy neighbors as thyself'. Therefore, his ideal society avoids all class-hatred, class-warfare, revengefulness and the like. It insists upon the spirit of social service and brotherly love.

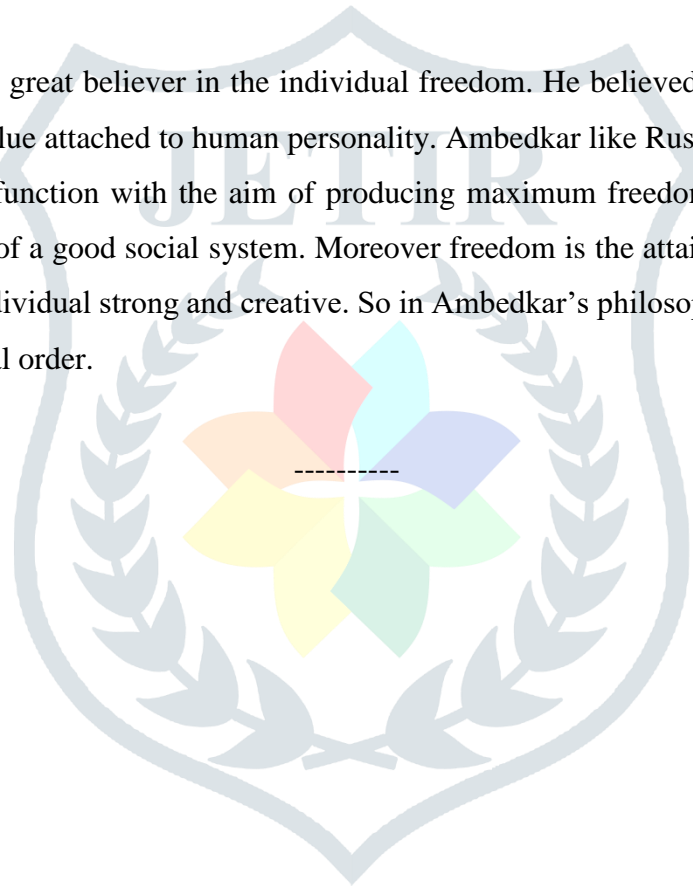
Dr. Ambedkar was an enthusiastic supporter of an ideal society without the caste system. It is a society where all individuals are respected equally, give them equal power to act, give them freedom to choose their profession by their own choice. Only, in that case, a true spirit of fraternal relationship may be strengthened.

The essential features of Ambedkar's democratic ideal lies in the spirit of common good, the welfare of all. "This involves an attitude of giving all larger shares in cultural and material goods. Looked at from this view point, his vision of an ideal social organization aims at a just and equitable relations between man and man based

on choice, equal consideration, equal opportunity, brotherly love, democracy and social justice".¹¹ So, his vision of an ideal society is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. According to Ambedkar, the main characteristics of an ideal society are as follows:

- (i) The society which uphold the right of every individual to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, to free speech and the exercise of religion.
- (ii) The society which makes it possible for every individual to enjoy freedom from want and freedom from fear.
- (iii) The society in which the absence of internal disorder, tyranny, injustice, oppression and forced-labour.
- (iv) The society which remove social, political and economic inequalities by providing better opportunities to all individuals in society.

Conclusion: Ambedkar is a great believer in the individual freedom. He believed in the intrinsic worth of the individual and the infinite value attached to human personality. Ambedkar like Russell asserts that all social and political institutions should function with the aim of producing maximum freedom for the individual because freedom is the supreme aim of a good social system. Moreover freedom is the attainment of the capacity of self direction which makes an individual strong and creative. So in Ambedkar's philosophy the individual freedom is supreme rather than the social order.



¹¹ Jatava. D.R., *Social Philosophy of B.R.Ambedkar*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1997, p-75.