

Early Influences on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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Abstract: Ambedkar said that his "five years of stay in Europe and America had completely wiped out of his mind any consciousness that he was an Untouchable ". In other words, it meant that Untouchability was so very entrenched in the Indian society and that it was difficult not to be affected by it and indeed it was only in foreign environment that its impact could be avoided. Ambedkar had to go out of India to realise not just what is like to be an Untouchable in India but what it is like to be a free human being without the effects of the social stigma.

Key words:- Ambedkar, Untouchables, Annihilation, constitutional, representation, intervention etc.

Ambedkar said that his "five years of stay in Europe and America had completely wiped out of his mind any consciousness that he was an Untouchable ". In other words, it meant that Untouchability was so very entrenched in the Indian society and that it was difficult not to be affected by it and indeed it was only in foreign environment that its impact could be avoided. Ambedkar had to go out of India to realise not just what is like to be an Untouchable in India but what it is like to be a free human being without the effects of the social stigma. He knew in India the problem of Untouchability did not permit the Untouchables to acquire wide knowledge and to secure equal footing in political, social, economic and religious fields. Ambedkar's exposure to foreign lands strengthened his liberal convictions and contributed much to the sharing of the emancipatory mind.

Books

Ambedkar was a versatile reader. His love of books was great and was evident even in his childhood. Like Jefferson who said that his first love was literary pursuits and Tilak who would rather be a Professor of Mathematics in a free India, Ambedkar loved the company of books. There are not many who had the same passion for reading as Ambedkar. Ambedkar made maximum use of libraries. At London, he often spent from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. in the pursuit of knowledge in the libraries. He was a regular visitor to the Indian office library, the London University Library and other city libraries. Ambedkar's thirst for knowledge was satisfied through his studies in Foreign Countries. Ambedkar had studied the history of Greece, Rome, France, Germany and other nations. His extensive reading of history had given him proper perception to tackle the social and political problems of India. Ambedkar studied the history of slavery in Rome, the conditions of Negroes in America and Jews in Germany. At his house 'Rajagriha', Ambedkar maintained a very good library. His collection of good books was enormous. He had the habit of purchasing books and he used to return to India with lots of book boxes from foreign countries. It once happened that boxes containing books were lost in a steamer. He felt very sad and continued to feel the loss of these books. Pandit M. Malviya had once offered Ambedkar "two lakhs of rupees" in exchange of his library. Ambedkar declined the offer by saying that his library was his eye and loosing it would be like losing his eye sight. His reading was

very extensive and once when his physician told that he would lose eyesight, he wept bitterly. Infact, he was so frustrated at the thought of losing his eyesight that he went to the extent of saying that he'd put an end to his life. Ambedkar was very good in Sanskrit, Persian, Marathi, Hindi and English. Through the books he read, he drew lots of inspiration. These books had great impact on Ambedkar's struggle for social justice. It would be useful to know some of the indigenous books and the foreign books which helped Ambedkar to mould his character and personality and gave him ideas to stand up to the challenge of social inequality and injustice in his native land.

K. S. Thakare's 'Gramanyacha Itihas' Marathi publication published in 1919 gives information regarding performing 'Upanayana'. Ambedkar used this book to state that the Brahmins' exclusive right to perform the Upanayana and the support of the Brahmins for the performance of Upanayana need not be based on religious grounds. It could be purchased by money. For instance, Shivaji got the support of the Brahmin Gangabhat on payment of money. Ambedkar was interested in reading some of the excellent Marathi dramas written by Gadkari. From London, he used to write letters to Shrivastav to send the playwrights of Gadkari.

Ambedkar's proficiency in Sanskrit made him to have wide knowledge about Hinduism. The original texts of Hinduism were all in Sanskrit. Ambedkar would recite 'Mahabharatha, Ramayana, Upanishads, Manusmrithi' and other religious texts. Due to vast reading, he could assess the draw backs of these texts and could build his own theories. His books on 'Castes in India', 'Annihilation of Caste', 'Philosophy of Hinduism', 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India' and 'Who were the Shudras' and Riddles in Hinduism speak of his wide knowledge which Ambedkar had derived from the original Hindu Religious texts. His wide knowledge acquired through reading the various religious texts strengthened his views to emancipate the oppressed.

Ambedkar had studied great deal of literature on religious, social, political and economic life of India. Hopkins', 'The Great Epic of India', Vincent Smith's 'Early History of India', C. V. Vaidya's 'The Riddle of the Ramayana' and 'History of Medieval India', P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar's 'Life in Ancient India in the Age of of Manthra's', Abbe Dubois's 'Hindu Manners and Customs' and Prof. D. S. Trivedi's 'The Original Home of the Aryans' were some of the great books which Ambedkar read with great interest and delight which contributed in no mean way to the development of his own ideas. Ambedkar's study of Stanley Rice's 'Hindu customs and their Origins' helped to know how Untouchability had come into existence. Ambedkar saw much in common in Prof. Emile Durkheim's 'The Elementary Forms of the Religious life', Goethe's 'Maxims and Reflections' and Maxim Gorky's 'Literature and Life' gave imagination and intuition to Ambedkar to write on the Origin of Untouchability.

Prof. Buhler's 'Laws of Manu', Oldenberg's 'Life of Buddha', C. F. Oldham's 'Life of Napoleon', Prof. Sloane's 'The Sun and the Serpent', Jeanyee Wong's 'Buddha His Life and Teachings' were all read along with many other literary works like Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', Jayasswal's 'Hindu Polity', Wilson's 'Vishnu Purana' and 'Rigveda', Prof. Senart's 'Castes in India', Prof. Webber's 'The Hindu Social System' and Ketkar's History of Caste in India.

Since Ambedkar had exposed to Western Countries, he was attracted by emancipatory doctrines and tradition which he upheld in his approach to the study of socio-economic problems of India. Ambedkar thoroughly read books written by liberal writers like, Walter Bagehot, James Bryce, Jennings, Pendleton Herring, Prof. A. B. Hart, Prof. L. T. Hobhouse, John Shore, Prof. Dicey, Porritt, Prof. H. J. Laski and many others. Ambedkar traces the failure of the

liberal party in India by referring to Pendleton Herring's 'Politics of Democracy' Herring had said that a party to be effective should have an organisation with a High Command, Large Circle of supporters and Floating Population. Ambedkar was of the view that the failure of the liberal party in India was due to its weak organisation.

Ambedkar also agreed with the view expressed by Grote in his 'History of Greece' (vol. iii) that, for the realisation of self government the existence of constitutional morality is essential. He was particularly impressed by the words of John Adams, who said, "we may appeal to every page of history we have hitherto turned over, for proof irrefragable that the people when they have been unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous, and cruel as any King or Senate possessed of uncontrollable power: the majority has eternally and without one exception usurped over the rights of the minority".

Ambedkar's reading on Constitutions and Constitutionalism was very extensive. The citations from the books of constitutional experts in the Constituent Assembly are a clear evidence of his awareness of the writings of experts in the field. Ambedkar appreciated Dicey's 'law of the Constitution' for its serious limitations on Sovereignty. Ambedkar described Walter Bagehot's book on English Constitution as "a classic treatise", According to Bagehot Parliamentary government means government by discussion and not by fisticuffs. Ambedkar had wide knowledge about parliamentary form of democracy. This was possibly due to his indepth reading of the writings of experts on democracy. He said that to his knowledge no one has explained the relationship of the King and his Ministers in a responsible government better than Macaulay. He had read James Bryce's writings and one can see his influence in Ambedkar's writings and speeches. It was his wide readings which made Ambedkar to define Democracy as "a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed".

Books were a constant company and Ambedkar managed to read books even when he was totally involved in public life. He had read the works of Herbert Apthekar's. 'The Negro in the Civil War', Prof. Giddings 'Democracy and Empire', Russell's 'Principles of Social Reconstructions' and Prof E. L. Thorndike's 'Educational Psychology'. Mention could be made of some of the books on Economics which inspired Ambedkar. They were Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations', Prof. N. G. Pierson's 'Principle of Economics', Prof. H. J. Davenport's 'The Economics of Enterprise', Prof. Richard. T. Ely's 'Outlines of Economics' and Robert Giffen's 'Essays in Finance' and books of Karl marx'. The impact of these books on his mind in all that he said and wrote has definitely contributed to the growth of Ambedkar's intellectualism.

Ambedkar had read good number of articles and seminar papers in leading journals and newspapers of his times. He himself contributed articles to journals and newspapers. The intellectual mind of Ambedkar has to be properly looked in order to discern the discourse he made to emancipate the voiceless.

Experiences

Greatness of Ambedkar, his sacrifices in the cause of justice and his concern for the downtrodden have to be assessed in the context of his own experiences as an Untouchable in a caste-ridden society. The bitter experience he had in his own Country and the pleasant time he had outside helped Ambedkar to compare the social status of individuals

which in turn shaped his personality. His experience made him to raise the path of emancipatory Discourse - 'Educate, Organise and Agitate' to liberate the oppressed and restore their deprived rights.

Ambedkar was prone to two particular trends of experience one was his own experience which was a very important part of his life and personality and the other was the experience of others which he learned as a sensitive reader and a shrewd observer.

Ambedkar's first realization of his being an Untouchable came about when he was hardly nine years old. While on his way to Goregan from Satara along with his brother and sister's son to spend the summer vacation with his father, he had to suffer the indignity of going without water and food because of his low caste. The distance of nearly 10 miles from Masur railway station to his father's place he had to cover by a bullock cart engaged by the Station Master. The harrowing experience of the cart ride and the denial of water by the toll collector and improper shelter because of his caste had "indelible impression" on Ambedkar's young mind.

Ambedkar was fully aware that Untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations. For instance he knew that he could not sit in the midst of his classmates in the school and could not drink water without the assistance of a high caste. At home he knew no washerman would wash the clothes of an Untouchable and no barber would entertain an Untouchable. Ambedkar's experience at Baroda, while in job, had a tremendous impact on him. As he was educated by the Baroda State, he was bound to serve the State according to the contract. At the railway station no one came to receive him. He managed to stay at a Parsi's inn on condition that he "should pay him a rupee and half per day for board and lodging and to enter himself as a parsi in his register". The inn was not an ideal place for a probationary in the Accountant General's office of the Maharaja of Baroda State. Books were the only company to Ambedkar during his stay in this Inn. It was on "11th day of his stay" in the inn, that the owner came and gave Ambedkar an ultimatum to leave the inn by the evening. Ambedkar "Cursed all and wept bitterly" for being "deprived of his precious possession namely his shelter". The Baroda State did not come to his rescue by providing him State bungalow nor his two friends one a Hindu and another a Christian could allow him to stay with them. Ambedkar decided to return to Bombay. He spent some time in the Kamathi Public Garden before leaving Baroda at 9 p.m. The scene of Parsis armed with sticks vacating him from the inn could not be forgotten by Ambedkar. It was then that he learnt that a "person who is an Untouchable to a Hindu is also an Untouchable to Parsi".

The third incident occurred when Ambedkar was appointed as a member to investigate the grievances of the Untouchables by the Government of Bombay in 1929. From Chalisgaon, Ambedkar had to go to a village on the Dhulia line to investigate a case of social boycott declared by the caste Hindus against the Untouchables. At Chalisgaon, the Untouchables who lived at Maharwada quarters two miles from the railway station, wanted their leader Ambedkar to visit their area. So, they hired a tonga on the condition that the tonga would be driven by the Untouchable. The Tonga was driven by an inexperienced Untouchable. With the result that it met with an accident fracturing Ambedkar's leg. Ambedkar on knowing the fact behind the Tonga deal learnt that a "Hindu tongawalla, no better than a menial, has a dignity by which he can look upon himself as a person who is superior to all Untouchables even though he (Dr. Ambedkar) may be a Barrister-at-Law"

Another bitter experience occurred in 1934 at Daulatbad, the historical city. Ambedkar and his friends washed their faces and legs on the pavement with the water from the tank near the fort. The Mohammedans came shouting "The Dheds (meaning Untouchables) have polluted the tank" and abused with filthy language. Ambedkar asked one of young Muslims in the crowd if an Untouchable converted to Islam could use the tank. The Muslim was unable to answer this query. This incident only proved that Untouchability was seeped in the Indian social system affecting all.

Ambedkar had also learnt of others experiences through books, narration, complaints etc. which had a lasting impact on him. The harrowing tales of ill treatment because of one's low caste made Ambedkar to throw himself in the struggle for the emancipation of the deprived people of the society. The tragic case of the wife of an Untouchable School Teacher in a village in Kathiwar shocked Ambedkar. The woman had just delivered and was not feeling very well but the doctor refused to treat the patient because of her being at the Untouchable colony. Only when the patient was brought outside the Untouchable colony that the doctor gave his thermometer to a Muslim and this Muslim gave it to the teacher who gave it to his wife and then it was returned by the same process. The doctor looking at the thermometer said that the patient was suffering from pneumonia. Although doctor sent medicine he refused to see her later though the fee was paid. The woman and her child died. This inhuman attitude of the doctor towards the Untouchable was greatly criticised by Ambedkar. According to Ambedkar, "the Hindu would prefer to be inhuman rather than touch an Untouchable".

The resignation of Parmer Kalidas Shivram, a Bhangi as Talati in the office of Mamlatdar of Borsad Taluka because of intolerance and ill-treatment of high castes only demonstrated what awaits low castes when appointed to high positions. This episode had great influence on Ambedkar who vowed to fight discrimination in public offices on the grounds of caste.

Another case of a person being victimized because of his low caste was when Rammahashaya a Dom rescued a calf from a well. Instead of being thankful to him Hindus raised hue and cry that their well had been defiled and polluted. A similar sort of case occurred in Kaladi, a village of Calicut. A child was rescued by an Untouchable from the well but, the Hindus abused and assaulted as he had polluted the well.

All the above episodes are bitter reminders of the inhuman treatment meted out to the Untouchables and a very sensitive Ambedkar could not have been a mere witness. He found himself launching serious emancipatory discourses in the form of agitations like the Mahad agitation to allow Untouchables to drink water from public tanks, the agitation of temple entry and finally the revival of Buddhism. All the agitations he staged was for the dignity of the individual which is the Pillar of the emancipatory discourse.

Company

Ambedkar always kept very good company. Though he was born as an Untouchable, he had many friends outside his caste. He had Brahmins who admired him for his role towards social equality. It was his friends who helped him during personal financial crises. 'Naval Bhathena', a Parsi was a life-long friend who readily helped Ambedkar with finances whenever he was in dire need. S. K. Bole and Krishnaji Arjun Keluskar were his well wishers. Ambedkar

tried to help an aged Keluskar by submitting a representation to the Maharaja of Baroda to grant a monthly pension. His highness Maharaja Sri Sayaji Rao Gaekwad and Maharaja Sri Shahu of Kholapur were Ambedkar's benefactors. S. N. Shivatrkar who stood by Ambedkar for over twenty years in his great war against Untouchability, later, he became Ambedkar's secretary and also an Educational Supervisor under the Municipal School Committee. Ambedkar had played a very notable part in this appointment. Sri Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad, G. K. Nariman, Dr. R. P. Paranjpye and B. G. Kher were his good friends who worked for Bahishkrit Hatakarini Sabha. Surendranath Tipnis, Subhedar Savdkar and Anantrao Chitre used to take care in arranging Ambedkar's Programmes. Savarkar used to whole heartedly support Ambedkar's struggle. Dr. Panjabrao Desmukh, G. A. Gavai and Krishnaji S. Kadam took active part with Ambedkar during his social struggle. Jedhe and Javalkar the non Brahmin leaders of Maharashtra supported Ambedkar during his Mahad Agitation. M. K. Jadhav an Untouchable was a great admirer of Ambedkar. It was Ambedkar's struggle which helped M. K. Jadhav to be appointed as Deputy Collector. Deorao Naik a Brahmin colleague of Ambedkar acted as an Acharya in putting sacred threads to the depressed people at Chiplum in April 1929.

Ambedkar had many Brahmin associates and friends. It is evident that he did not hate Brahmins but was opposed to Brahminism. Ambedkar's friend Dastur Bode who was well versed in the Indo Iranian literature helped Ambedkar in his literary pursuits. Ambedkar got the information relating to the meaning of 'Varna' occurring in Indo-Iranian literature from Dastur Bode. Bhaskar Rao Kadrekar was the editor of Ambedkar's weekly 'Janata'. Prof. S. M. Mate, a social reformer devoted to the cause of the education for the Untouchables worked with Ambedkar in giving education to the depressed class people of the society. Dr. Sadanand Galvnkar was Ambedkar's close associate with whom he used to stay at Bassein.

During election times, Ambedkar with his Independent Labour Party had good company in Bhopatkar the leader of the Democratic Swaraj Party. Kelkar actively supported Ambedkar. Jamnadas Mehta was Ambedkar's political friend. M. C. Rajah was initially good with Ambedkar, but, later difference arose but were settled with the intervention of other Ambedkar admirers Rajbhoj and Jayakar.

Ambedkar was grateful to Mrs. Funny, an Irish Widow for her help to study and observe the Parliamentary proceedings from close quarters at the House of Commons. Mrs. Rennie Smith an officer in the Secretariat of the House of Commons had deep sympathy for Ambedkar's role towards the emancipation of the Depressed Classes. Robert J. Mofall was his class fellow at Columbia University. Miss Dresser who belonged to American Church Mission was his admirer Ambedkar used to give his new books to her for reading.

The intellectual company of Ambedkar was also very strong. I. A. Ezekiel, in the field of Journalism supported Ambedkar and his Movements. S. S. Rege, Librarian of the Siddharth College was given the responsibility of publishing the books of Ambedkar. Rattu was Ambedkar's private secretary who had the opportunity to share his life with Ambedkar till his master's death. Shankaranand Shastri, Dr. M. B. Nivogi former Chief, Justice of the Nagpur High Court, M. B. Chitnis and B. H. Varale were Ambedkar's good associates who later embraced Buddhism with Ambedkar. Ambedkar had trusted lieutenants in B. S. Gaikwad, R. D. Bhandare, B. C. Kamble, P. T. Borale

and a large number of followers in D. R. Gholap, Dattabe Santharam Pawar, Gangavane, Shridhara Pant, Balwant Tilak Son of B. G. Tilak and others.

In the Constituent Assembly Ambedkar had the company of such stalwarts like Prof. K. T. Shah, Pundit Lakshmikant Maitra and T. T. Krishnamachari along with others.

The company that Ambedkar kept was some measure of his own personality and character. All his friends, associates and followers had a great deal to do with the mental outlook of Ambedkar and had contributed in making Baba Saheb as a leader and a liberator. Such an exposure to Ambedkar engulfed in the creation of a strong emancipatory Discourse in the nation.

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