

INTERPRETATION OF DR. AMBEDKAR'S EMANCIPATORY DISCOURSE

Dr. J. Somashekar
Professor of Political Science
DoS in Political Science
Vijayanagara ShriKrishnadevaraya University, Ballary.

Abstract:- Modern India owes a great deal to Ambedkar's ideas. Born as an untouchable and suffering serious disabilities in the Indian society, Ambedkar rose to be "a symbol of revolt against all the oppressive features of Hindu society" as Jawahar Lal Nehru puts it. His revolt was meant to secure and defend emancipatory principles and ideals. His important concern was to ensure 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' to the oppressed masses of India and the world in general. Ambedkar's commitment to the emancipatory philosophy was the direct consequence of his being a Untouchable and his own social status in the Indian society. Coming from a very low caste and facing many hurdles in the social, religious, political and economic fields, he devoted himself and his life to fight for justice for the suppressed and secure adequate safe guards and rights to the tyrannized people.

Key words:- Ambedkar, liberal principles and traditions, humanitarian, emancipatory etc.

Modern India has seen many great men and leaders whose contribution has been immense. One such man of great vision and extraordinary brilliance was Ambedkar. Ambedkar had multi-faceted personality. His vision of India differed from that of other Indian leaders of his time. Undoubtedly he rendered sterling service to the nation. Often his great ideas and lofty ideals were misunderstood or misinterpreted. But, if one closely examines the ideas of Ambedkar one can understand and appreciate their usefulness and relevance to modern India.

Modern India owes a great deal to Ambedkar's ideas. Born as an untouchable and suffering serious disabilities in the Indian society, Ambedkar rose to be "a symbol of revolt against all the oppressive features of Hindu society" as Jawahar Lal Nehru puts it. His revolt was meant to secure and defend emancipatory principles and ideals. His important concern was to ensure 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' to the oppressed masses of India and the world in general. Ambedkar's commitment to the emancipatory philosophy was the direct consequence of his being a Untouchable and his own social status in the Indian society. Coming from a very low caste and facing many hurdles in the social, religious, political and economic fields, he devoted himself and his life to fight for justice for the suppressed and secure adequate safe guards and rights to the tyrannized people. Throughout his life. Ambedkar had to struggle against Orthodox elements in the Hindu society on the one hand and the foreign authorities on the other to make available the benefits of emancipatory discourses to the citizens of India. Ambedkar had to compromise many a times on basic principles of emancipatory discourses. In home his commitment was unreserved, mostly out of disgust and against his conscious. His moral defense was his concern for the neglected sections of the society whose interests were trampled upon by an arrogant and privileged section of the society. It is at times difficult to see Ambedkar's extreme views in the right perspective today but,

anybody with a clear understanding and appreciation of the social realities of pre-independent India would agree with Ambedkar's logic and consider his line of thinking not as a lapse but a definite inevitable self intensifying course of action.

Ambedkar's prime objective was to reform the society and the Hindu mind. He knew it was a very difficult and yet a very noble task. Through his academic background he was well equipped to enjoy the moral strength to start the struggle and to go about it in an orderly way. His emancipatory struggles can be classified under three main groups Social, Political and Religious. What sustained him in the struggle against the evils of Indian society in general and Hindus in particular was his own understanding of liberal doctrines and traditions. He was able to apply basic principles of liberal philosophy in approach to the solution of the vexed social problem of India. His social struggle was primarily aimed at establishing equality. The caste system stood for 'inequality' in which Ambedkar who was himself its victim. As a great crusader of the down trodden, he waged a relentless struggle against the old order which was devoid of human dignity and was based on injustice.

His agitation to secure basic rights for the oppressed people brought to the fore the serious social peculiarities of the Indian society and exposed the hypocrisy of the upper castes. Ambedkar struggled to secure basic civic rights like the right to collect water from public tanks and wells, temple entry, entry into public places such as Parks, Museums, Public Resorts, Public Burial Grounds etc, and right to education. In all his struggles one could notice a strong reliance on western liberal principles and traditions. The broad objectives and outcome of his struggles are a testimony of his faith in and dependence on emancipatory doctrines.

Ambedkar's aim was to establish social equality. Through his leadership and strategies, not only the depressed classes but the Indian society as a whole was benefited. India owes a debt of gratitude to this great humanitarian and social reformer for the awakening he brought about in the neglected sections of society and created healthy environment for these hitherto voiceless people to contribute their due share to India's progress and prosperity. Ambedkar's aim of social equality can be easily achieved only when society itself recognizes equality as a value in all aspects of human life. He had created a theoretical base to build his own idea of social equality. Social awareness and his emphasis on recognition and elimination of social evils was Ambedkar's greatest theoretical contribution. The atmosphere which prevailed during his time does not exist today. It has changed and the credit for it should necessarily go to Ambedkar's pioneering work as a social liberator. However much needs to be done in this regard. There can be no second opinion that Ambedkar's ideas on social equality are as relevant to-day as even before. His views on caste system demonstrate his appreciation of liberal webberian thought. If one understand his liberal views correctly on caste system and appreciates his aim of social equality, one can agree with his approach to the social problems of India. He believed that social inequality found in Indian society was due to the religious beliefs which were created by the orthodox elements in the Hindu society. Ambedkar had rightly focused attention on the principle of social equality in the Constitution of India itself making it a constitutional guarantee thus affecting lasting liberal influence on the Indian ethos. His whole life was a ceaseless struggle for the attainment of this great objective. Former President K.R. Narayan believed that the future

generations of India "will be free from the curse of the caste system and the refined as well as crude remnants of 'Untouchability' and that they "will be grateful to Ambedkar for having launched a movement of social revolution, the success of which is indispensable for cleansing Indian society, for unifying the Indian nation and for building a genuine and enduring democratic system in our country". This itself is a great evidence of Ambedkar's greatness as a social reformer and harbinger of a new era in Indian social system. As a pragmatic liberal thinker Ambedkar knew well that if liberal democracy were to work in India, social equality was to be first achieved. For him, all scripts and writing advocating social inequality in any way were anathema and it was precisely because of this that in 1927 he publicly burnt the Manu Smriti. He knew that all his emancipatory doctrine would be useless if social inequality prevailed and that liberal principles will work meaningfully only under conditions where every one enjoyed equality.

Ambedkar regarded political power for Dalits as an essential requirement if the oppressed and the downtrodden were to be saved from the strangle hold of the dominant upper castes. Political power he thought help them to emancipate themselves from the age old exploitation and tyranny. Ambedkar was convinced that one should have political power if one wants to bring about the kind of changes one desires and meet the ends of justice. It was, in fact, this kind of realization which had prompted him to accept political assignments such as membership of the legislative council, membership of the executive council, membership of the constituent assembly and chairmanship of the drafting committee and the membership of free India's first cabinet, despite political odds and his own personal indifference to office. Ambedkar became a powerful spokesman and champion of the downtrodden to secure their political rights. In his political struggle he had to face many a serious situation calling for great strength of moral character and that he succeeded was no surprise to his contemporaries. He used every available opportunity to demand adequate share in political power and constitutional safe guards for the dalits as was evident at the Round Table Conferences. Through his writings, his newspapers and political parties, he waged relentless battles to strengthen and secure liberal ideas which he valued at high esteem.

Although he was perfectly justified in demanding separate electorate for dalits which would not only gave them proper representation but also ensured their political importance. If Gandhiji had not opposed it, and accepted the Communal Award in its liberal spirit, the dream of Ambedkar would have been realised smoothly in independent India. However, it was only after Gandhiji's fast that the Congress leaders were willing to countenance the affirmative use of the law to abolish disabilities and in particular to obtain by law the admission of untouchables to hindu temples there by symbolizing their inclusion within the Hindu Community.

Ambedkar learnt through his experience that it was not easy to reform the Hindu religion. He regarded religion important to mankind. But he wanted a religion in which his basic liberal principle of liberty, equality and fraternity are enshrined. He considered Hindu religion lacks these but found such liberal principles enshrined in the teachings of Lord Buddha and hence decided to embrace Buddhism along with his followers. His commitments to emancipatory doctrines and faith in them was such that he even had the courage of conviction to apply them even in the case of judging his own religion. This attitude of Ambedkar demonstrates his strong

adherence to the liberal philosophy. Through out his life he advocated the liberal trinity. He was a man who believed that the gospel of liberalism would emancipate the suffering masses of the world. For this purpose he utilized his knowledge, experience and all resources at his command towards the attainment of the objective of securing liberty, equality and fraternity for his countrymen. Social equality in the context of Indian caste system had infact become an euigma for Ambedkar and no wonder, he bestowed all attention on the need for guaranteeing social equality in India. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia had rightly observed that Ambedkar "was a great crusader for social equality".

Social justice and social equalities, Ambedkar rightly believed, were closely inter-related. Social equality ensures social justice. Ambedkar wanted justice to prevail in the Indian society which suffered from injustice done to the exploited people in the name of religion. Ambedkar being a legal luminary realized that when social equality is established it would be easier to achieve the final goal of social justice. Social equality was a means to secure justice to all who suffered from slavery, tyranny and exploitation. To achieve this he broke the shackles of tradition, religious orthodoxy and blind superstition. Ambedkar went a step forward to establish social justice in the Indian society with the provision for protective discrimination in the Constitution of India. Article 15(4) provide that nothing in Article 15 or Article 29(2) shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially, economically and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Article 16(4) provides that nothing in Article 16 shall prevent the state from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts to the above said communities. Further, Articles 17,23,24,32,38,39,45,46,330,332,338,339, and 340 are all meant to achieve social justice. Ambedkar's obsession with the goal of social justice was such that the Government of India under V.P.Singh decided to observe Ambedkar's centenary year as the year of social justice (April 14, 1990 to April 13, 1991). Justice V.R.Krishna lyer very eloquently declared that Ambedkar "will be remembered as long as the Indian Constitution lasts, revered by all lovers of social justice" Ambedkar's long and arduous struggle in the cause of securing social equality and social justice has not only brought about a phenomenal change in the status of deprived people but also awakened the caste Hindus to the stock realities of social relationship in India.

Real democracy would be easier to achieve only where social equality and social justice are realized. Inequalities in society had to be abolished if democracy had to be meaningful and purposeful. Ambedkar was a pragmatic liberal thinker because he wanted democracy not only in political but also in social and economic fields of society. As a demonstrative device, political democracy is easier to achieve but it is very difficult to establish socio-economic Democracy. It is here that Ambedkar's ideas and methods prove both relevant and helpful. Social democracy to Ambedkar meant, "a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life". The principles of liberty, equality and fraternity he treated as a union of trinity. To divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. The ideal of economic democracy as envisaged by Ambedkar can be seen in the Dirrective Principles of State Policy. He had said that Directive Principles have a great value because they lay down the ideal of economic democracy. He considered social and economic democracy as the

tissues and fibre of political democracy. Democracy itself was only a means of achieving the important objective of social and economic justice. He defined democracy as a "form and a method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed". His prime concern was for the economic and social uplift of the people as a whole in which he saw the development of the nation. Though he was for revolutionary change he was against bloodshed. His abhorrence of violence was very much in line with his belief in the liberal dogma. Ambedkar's views on democracy in particular place him in the right path of the emancipatory discourse. His idea of democracy without bloodshed needs to be practiced in India. If the nation follows his views and conditions, democracy in India would work successfully.

His conditions were that -

1. There should not be glaring inequalities in the society;
2. There should be effective opposition;
3. There should be equality in law and administration;
4. There should be strict observance of constitutional morality;
5. Moral order;
6. There should be public conscience;
7. Free and fair election;

Successful working of democracy depends on the fulfillment of these conditions. In India these conditions need to be followed in letter and spirit. In a theoretical sense, Indian democracy is working well. But, an indepth analysis would suggest that a great deal needs to be done if Ambedkar's objective of real democracy is to be realized in India.

Ambedkar wanted to maintain democracy not merely in form but also in fact. He knew that democracy undergoes changes in form and in purpose. The Athenian democracy was as different from modern democracy as chalk is from cheese. After analyzing major trends in democracy, he had conclude that people should follow constitutional methods to achieve social and economic objectives to maintain democracy. He strictly followed constitutional methods all through his struggles to be an ideal defender of emancipatory theory. He considered unconstitutional methods as the basis of anarchy and so wanted them to be abandoned as soon as possible, if democracy is to be liberal and meaningful.

He considered Hero-Worship as a great threat to democracy. In a country like India where the religious tradition enables Bhakti or devotion, he knew that hero-worship was most likely to lead to degradation of democracy and eventual emergence of dictatorship. Like J.S.Mill who cautioned the people against laying their liberties at the feet of great men or to trust them with powers which enable them to subvert their institutions, Ambedkar cautioned the people against hero-worship. He wanted people to judge their representatives in a democratic manner and not to follow them blindly because democracy is not merely a form of government but it is a mode of associated living. In democracy an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen should be cultivated. So, he wanted people in a democratic state to be more alert and conscious of their rights and duties. Their political, social and economic awareness would help to make democracy meaningful.

Democracy would be meaningful where the minorities, the suppressed, voiceless, ignored and less fortunate people of the society have their share in political power. According to Ambedkar, the interest of these people should not be disregarded if democracy is to work effectively. In India political majority will always be 'Communal' since it will be in the hands of Hindus. Realising the Hindu character of the majority, he thought for and gave constitutional safeguards for the protection of minorities and the less fortunate people. He was unwilling to sacrifice or ignore the interest of the numerical minorities and backward classes for the sake of the majorities. Whatever the number, he was unprepared to accept the majority when the interest of even a single person on the side of a minority needed to be taken care of. His discourse was not catered to meet the demands of the majority but to safeguard the interest of the minorities the neglected, the voiceless, the suppressed and the ignored. It was infact for this reason that he wanted the Scheduled Castes people to be treated as minorities in the Indian society. It should be understood that his liberal attitude towards minorities actually meant meeting the ends of justice so far as the numerically ill placed were concerned. In his capacity as a powerful spokesman of minorities he played a notable role throughout his career.

Ambedkar's views on the Partition of India were based on hard realities and clear headed pragmatism. He analysed the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity on the historical grounds. All though his arguments he had brought out his strong liberal convictions. He wanted the true union of heart and soul resulting in social unity which is one of the major aspects of emancipatory path.

Ambedkar was seriously concerned with the well being of the nation under democratic system and hence advocated for strong central authority. A vast country like India with diversity in all fields and many grave social problems needed a strong Central Authority although it contradicted the federal principle. But for Ambedkar, the Centre which can work for the common goal and for the general interest of the country as a whole, there is nothing wrong in its being very strong. This should be seen as the direct result of Ambedkar's abiding faith in liberation of the oppressed as a pre-condition of any just society although liberal tenets and strong government are opposed to each other. The point to be appreciated is the concern displayed by Ambedkar towards the neglected people. He was willing to sacrifice a not too liberal an idea of strong government for the sake of a more important liberal idea of protecting the interest of the less fortunate. His belief in strong central authority and supremacy of Parliament arose out of two considerations -

- a. To ensure justice to all sections of population and in particular to protect the interest of the minorities and the suppressed and
- b. To deny the executive the chance of despotic power by making Parliament supreme and responsible.

Like many other liberal thinkers, Ambedkar had great concern for women. He was appreciative of the role of women in a democratic state like India and knew fully well the need for improving their status. He believed that women should enjoy rights and liberties on par with men. His Hindu Code Bill is strong evidence of his liberal approach towards the emancipation of women in the Indian society.

Being an economist, Ambedkar aimed at the uplift of the rural masses and their release from the centuries old clutches of poverty and deprivation. He asserted that Indian agriculture should be a state industry and advocated for the abolition of zamindari system, Khoti system, Mahar Watan system and intermediaries in the agricultural field. He stood for collective farming with the nationalization of agricultural land. His schemes of land reforms were meant to develop agriculture where in the development of primary and secondary industries would be possible. This he believed would enable the development of the economy. Ambedkar wanted the key and basic industries to be managed by the state. This was definitely an idea which classical liberals would frown upon. The theory of Laissez-Faire, the corner stone of economic liberalism was unacceptable to Ambedkar in the Indian context. He was of the firm view that extreme individualism was not the answer because of glaring inequalities existing in India. He wanted a progressive transformation of the society which would ensure economic welfare of the poor. He was willing to ignore some of the essential ideas of the classical liberal economists in favour of establishing a just society based on equality. He trusted the state to do this job. The state was to protect the poor against economic exploitation and promote welfare of all. It was in that spirit that he wanted basic and key industries to be owned by the state. The state being a supreme institution should exert itself to promote the economic standard of the people was his strong liberal sentiment. Ambedkar's liberal perspective is very evident in his 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India' and 'The Problem of the Rupee' In which he throws light on public finance and taxation in India. His progressive ideas become very clear in his later writings. Which are useful and instructive as introduction to the evolution of the present federal structure of the Indian polity.

Ambedkar's emancipatory discourse was aimed at benefiting both the individual and the society as a whole. He was not prepared to sacrifice one for the other. There was no contradiction either. He was perhaps following in the footsteps of a liberal like T.H.Green.

It is to the credit of Ambedkar that liberalism in its western context and transition came to be introduced in India on a very large scale. Its adoption, interpretation and emphasis definitely underwent change at the hands of Ambedkar in view of the peculiar socio-economic and political conditions in India and assumed significantly different and varied dimension. Its introduction in India to tackle problems, social in particular was itself a very great contribution of Ambedkar.

W.N. Kuber has rightly pointed out that Ambedkar combined liberalism with radical rationalism. His greatness lay in his belief in the traditional well-tested concept of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. He was easily one of the very few modern Indian leaders whose wide ranging thinking on a variety of subjects deserves to be closely studied. Ambedkar emerged as a profound thinker with strong awareness of his immediate environment. He saw the Indian society of his time with his own liberal influence in the background. He was a pragmatist par excellence, a stylist of high order and a profound social philosopher who never allowed himself to be swayed by abstract ideas and dogmas.

Ambedkar believed in effort, self help and self respect. He gave the slogan, 'Educate, agitate and organize' to fight against the injustices prevailing in the society. Modern India is greatly benefited by his emancipatory discourse.

Today the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are being enjoyed by the people though not at fuller extent. There is no doubt that education and economic standard of these unfortunate people has improved, yet the social standard still needs to be improved. In general, the visionary qualities and humanistic approach of Ambedkar have helped India solve some of her worst evils. Through his ideas, thought and hard work, Ambedkar richly deserved to be considered as one of the great builders of Modern India.

Today his struggles have started to yield results. In the political field Dalits have no longer constitute a neglected section of society. Kumari Mayavathi has proved that a Dalit Women can become the political leader in Indian Democratic system. In the academic arena the establishments of Ambedkar centres and centre for inclusion and exclusion studies have increased the strength of intellectualism of Ambedkar.

References of the Books

1. Lok Sabha Debates - Part - 1, 6th December 1956.
2. Ahir D. C, The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar (Bharat Ratna), 1990.
3. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches. Vol XIII.
4. Mainstream, August 8, 1992, Vol. XXX. No. 42. New Delhi
5. Galanter March, Competing Equalities, Oxford Uni. Press, Bombay, 1984
6. Ambedkar Mahaan, First Part, Edt. B. R. Sampla, Indian Buddhist Council, London, distributed by Bheema Patrika, Pub. Jallunder, Punjab, 1975.
7. From Dr. Ambedkar's address at Poona District Law Library on December 22, 1952
8. Coupland R, The Constitutional Problem in India, Part III Oxford University Press, 1944
9. Land Reforms and Agricultural Development, M. Narasimulu and Sudakar Reddy in Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Economic Philosophy, Edited by P. Ramaiah and K. Sateesh Reddy, Delta Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994.
10. Kuber W. N, Ambedkar A Critical Study, 1991.