



## ROLE OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR IN THE UPLIFTMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES

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### ABSTRACT

#### KEYWORDS:

*Amedkar, untouchability, scheduled castes, constitution.*

*There are many reformers who played an important role for the upliftment of scheduled castes including Jyotirao Phule, Ayyankali of Kerala and Lyothee Thass of Tamil Nadu. Dr. B.R. Amedkar emerged as a great leader of untouchables who fought against many social evils like untochability, caste restrictions and other discriminations. He devoted his whole life for protecting the life of untouchables in India. According to B.R. Amedkar, the dalits were primarily socially, economically and politically weak and could only be uplifted by changing the social structure through legal, political and educational means. He also advocated that hereditarian caste system can only be eliminated through educational and inter caste marriage. The aim of the present paper is to study the role of Dr. B.R. Amedkar in the upliftment of the scheduled castes.*

### INTRODUCTION

The caste system has played an important role in Indian society since ages. The caste system is classification of people into four main castes - the Brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. In this caste system, the shudras at the very bottom and considered as untouchables. They have been socially discriminated and exploited by the upper castes since time immemorial (Singh, 2009). They were performed unclean activities that no one else would do, like scavenging, cleaning urinals, carrying dead animals, killing rates and pests.

The scheduled castes is the legal and constitutional name collectively given to the groups which have traditionally occupied the lowest status in Indian society, which was outside the caste system and inferior to all other castes (Das, 2014).

Oxford dictionary define scheduled castes as the official name given in India to the lowest caste, considered 'untouchable' in orthodox Hindu scriptures and practice, officially regarded as socially disadvantaged.

Dr. B.R. Amedkar (1891-1956) was born in a poor dalit family which was considered as untouchable in Hindu society. He was the highly qualified person and active leader from within the community. He was the 'messiah' for a number of depressed people who were blind, deaf and dumb. One of the main objective of Amedkar was to unite the scheduled castes and then endow them with a separate identity that would offer them an alternative route out of sanskritization

(Jaffrelot, 2009). According to B.R. Amedkar, ours is a battle for freedom, ours is a battle not just for economical gains and political power, ours is a battle for reclamation of human personality which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social order and continue to be suppressed and mutilated.

In 1920, Ambedkar started a weekly newspaper 'Mooknayak' (Leader of silent) to criticise the traditional Hindu caste system and to fight against the caste discrimination. He also organised 'Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha' in 24 July, 1924 for the upliftment of depressed classes. The main purpose of this sabha was to 'educate, unite and agitate'.

The goal of Ambedkar was to raise the rightful status and to promote educational and socio-economic improvement among the untouchables. Ambedkar started various active movements against untouchability. He organised a Satyagraha in 1927 at Mahad in Maharashtra with 10,000 followers to draw and share water from a public lake. Many other movements like Hindu temple entry were also started in 1929-30.

Ambedkar attended the first round table conference held in London in 1930 and demanded separate electorate for untouchables. The British government agreed with Ambedkar and announced the communal award in favour of untouchables in 1932. Gandhi protested against this decision and went on a 'fast unto death'. According to Gandhi, the separate electorate for untouchables would divide the India on a

communal basis. Gandhi's fast got great support across the country. Under these circumstances, Ambedkar found himself under pressure and agreed to withdraw the demand of separate electorate for untouchables. An agreement was signed between the Ambedkar and Gandhi on September 24, 1932 which is known as Poona pact. This pact resulted the loss of separate electorate and reservation of seats for untouchables in regional legislative assemblies and central council of states

In 1936, Ambedkar organised the Independent Labour Party to defend the interest of Indian workers and depressed classes which contested provincial elections in 1937 and secured a total of 14 seats out of 17. Ambedkar let the world know the fact that untouchability is a part of the caste system and caste is the foundation on which the Hindu religion stands (Khalkho, 2005). At Yeola (Nasik) conference, he announced his intention to convert from Hinduism to some other religion. In this conference, he declared "Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but it is within my power to refuse to live ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu". In his book namely "The annihilation of caste"(1936), he strongly criticised Hinduism and highlighted the several reason to reject it. He advocated that caste system in India can destroy through education and inter-caste marriages.

After independence, Ambedkar became the first law minister of the country under congress-led government. He was appointed as the chairman of the constitutional drafting committee by the parliament. The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protection for individuals including freedom of religion, abolition of untouchability and outlawing the all forms of discrimination. He also won the assembly's support for introducing a reservation system in government jobs and educational institutions for members of SCs, STs and OBCs (Chand, 2011).

Ambedkar introduced many articles in the constitution for the upliftment of the scheduled castes. According to article 13(2) - "The state shall not make any law which takes away or abridges the rights conferred by this part and any law made in this contravention of this cause shall, to the extent of the contravention, be void". Article 14 assert that "The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India". Articles 15(4) declares that "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled Tribes (STs)". According to article 16 (4 A) "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any provision for reservation in matters of promotion with consequential seniority, to any class or classes of posts in the services under the state in favour of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes which in the opinion of the state, are not adequately represented in the service under the state". According to article 17, "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law". Due to all these provisions, Ambedkar has been regarded as the architect of Indian constitution.

## CONCLUSION

Various efforts taken by Ambedkar for the eradication of social evils and for the upliftment of the scheduled castes were remarkable. He incorporated various articles in the constitution of India for the development of scheduled castes such as provisions of equal status for scheduled castes, abolition of untouchability, provisions of voting rights to dalits, reservation in government services, education, promotion and political fields, etc. His contribution cannot be measured within few pages. Because of all his contribution, he is known as God of scheduled castes. He succeeded in his efforts to a greater extent but the desirable outcome is still far away from the reality. Despite the extended period of reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Ambedkar's dream of equality of human being still remains unfulfilled. For this, people of scheduled caste community will have to come forward and focus on their social, economical, social and political development. Besides, people of upper castes should change their mentality and more generous towards the upliftment of scheduled castes.

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