



DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR AS THE RENOWNED JOURNALISTIC MISSIONARY OF INDIA

ABSTRACT

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the greatest social reformers and national builder of India who has constitute a new mile stone in the history of mankind. India is passing through a testing time in view of increasing threats to national unity and integration. Social tensions, caste conflicts and communalism are continuously on the increase. He waged a historical war against all kinds of oppression through his papers, MOOKNAYAK (Leader of the Dumb), BAHISKRIT BHARAT (Excluded India), SAMATA (Equality) and JANATA (People). He championed the cause of the women and weaker sections through the profession of journalism for the first time in the history of the press in India. Unfortunately, the writers of the history of the press in India have not documented the journalistic contributions of Ambedkar. His observations in relation to social, economic, political and cultural issues and developments are becoming true. There is a vital need to preserve the thoughts of the noble son of India which are highly relevant in the present times. An attempt has been made hereby to give an account of the social philosophy of Dr.Ambedkar.

Ambedkar started 'Mook Nayak' (Leader of the Dumb) on January 31, 1920 which served as the voice of the Depressed Classes. He brilliantly propounded the need for social equality. He wrote: "India was a home of inequality. Hindu society, he observed, was just like a tower which had several storey's without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which one was born. Hindu society, he continued, consisted of three parts: the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the untouchables. He pitied the souls of those persons who said that according to their philosophy there existed God in animals as well as in animate things and yet treated their co-religionists as untouchables. He lamented that not the spread of knowledge and literacy but accumulation and monopoly was the aim of the Brahmins. In his view the backwardness of the non-Brahmins was due to lack of education and power. In order to save the Depressed Classes from perpetual slavery, poverty and ignorance, herculean efforts must be made, he asserted, to awaken them from their disabilities.⁴ In this context the study of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar as the renowned Journalistic Missionary of India is a unique chapter in the history of India.

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INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the greatest social reformers and national builder of India who has constitute a new mile stone in the history of mankind. India is passing through a testing time in view of increasing threats to national unity and integration. Social tensions, caste conflicts and communalism are continuously on the increase. He waged a historical war against all kinds of oppression through his papers, MOOKNAYAK (Leader of the Dumb), BAHISKRIT BHARAT (Excluded India), SAMATA (Equality) and JANATA (People). He championed the cause of the women and weaker sections through the profession of journalism for the first time in the history of the press in India. Unfortunately, the writers of the history of the press in India have not documented the journalistic contributions of Ambedkar. His observations in relation to social, economic, political and cultural issues and developments are becoming true. There is a vital need to preserve the thoughts of the noble son of India which are highly relevant in the present times. An attempt has been made hereby to give an account of the social philosophy of Dr.Ambedkar.

DISCUSSION

Ambedkar started 'Mook Nayak' (Leader of the Dumb) on January 31, 1920 which served as the voice of the Depressed Classes. He brilliantly propounded the need for social equality. He wrote: "India was a home of inequality. Hindu society, he observed, was just like a tower which had several storey's without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which one was born. Hindu society, he continued, consisted of three parts: the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the untouchables. He pitied the souls of those persons who said that according to their philosophy there existed God in animals as well as in animate things and yet treated their co-religionists as untouchables. He lamented that not the spread of knowledge and literacy but accumulation and monopoly was the aim of the Brahmins. In his view the backwardness of the non-Brahmins was due to lack of education and power. In order to save the Depressed Classes from perpetual slavery, poverty and ignorance, herculean efforts must be made, he asserted, to awaken them from their disabilities.⁴

Ambedkar had strongly argued that social equality, justice and freedom were the pre-requisites

for swaraj. Ambedkar produced series of thought provoking writings criticizing social injustice, untouchability and backwardness based on caste system in India. He organized a social revolution throughout the nation on the basis of the thoughts and works of Buddha, Basavanna and Jyotiphule. He asserted that it was not enough for India to be an independent country. She must rise as a good state guaranteeing equal status in matters of religion, society, economy and polity to all classes, offering everyman an opportunity to rise in the scale of life and create conditions favorable to the advancement of the people regardless of class and caste.

Ambedkar asserted that if the protection of the Britishers were withdrawn, those who did not condescend to look at the untouchables would trample upon them. He stated that the Swaraj wherein there were no fundamental rights guaranteed for the Depressed Classes, would not be a Swaraj to them. It would be a new slavery for them.⁵ Ambedkar waged a relentless war against all oppressive characteristics and elements of Indian society through several organizations. He founded 'Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha' on July 20, 1924 with a view to - a) promote the spread of education among the Depressed Classes by opening hostels or by employing such other means as may seem necessary or desirable, b) promote the spread of culture among the Depressed Classes by opening libraries, social centres and classes or study classes, c) advance and improve the economic condition of the Depressed Classes by starting industrial and agricultural schools; and d) represent the grievances of the Depressed Classes. This organization worked for social revolution and cautioned the untouchables that the activities of Congress and Gandhi carried more gesture than active struggle for breaking the shackles that bound the Depressed Classes. He exhorted them to fight for self-elevation.

Ambedkar primarily concentrated his efforts on social movement and marched on a different direction. He putforth his efforts towards preparing the heads, hearts and hands of the Depressed Classes to secure human rights and equal opportunities. He led the marches for sharing the tank water and securing social dignity. He organized series of conferences throughout the country to bring about new consciousness and preparedness among the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar exposed the inhuman attitudes of those who raised violent protests against

the insulting treatment meted out to the Indians in South Africa and to the Indian students in Britain and at the same time denied human rights to their countrymen and co-religionists in India. He made a fervent appeal to all leaders and publics at large who favored the abolition of untouchability, to transform their sympathy into practicality and bring the reform into reality in their day to day life. He argued that untouchability was responsible for the destruction of untouchables, Hindus and the entire India. He emerged not only as a scholar but also as a spokesman of the dumb and downtrodden in India.

Ambedkar emphasized that the Depressed Classes would die for that religion which took care of them, but they would not care for the religion which did not care for them. He said that untouchability was such an abominable stain that it would not matter much even if some lives were sacrificed to wash it out. Any action that unified the people was good, where there was unity there was a good cause.⁶

Ambedkar gave a new dimension to the religion and argued that the religion which treats crores of its adherents worse than dogs and criminals and inflicts upon them insufferable disabilities is no religion at all. Religion is not the appellation for such an unjust order. He cautioned: "Untouchability shuts all doors of opportunities for betterment in life to the untouchables. It is mischievously propagated by Hindu scriptures that by serving the upper three classes the Shudras attain salvation. Untouchability is another appellation for slavery. No race can be raised by destroying its self respect. If the Depressed Classes gained their self respect and freedom, they would contribute not only to their own progress and prosperity but by their industry, intellect and courage would contribute also to the strength and prosperity of the nation".⁷

Ambedkar burnt the 'Manusmriti' on December 25, 1927 since it was a charter of rights for Caste Hindus which upheld inequality injustice, discrimination and exploitation. He argued that the roots of 'Manusmriti' should be burnt first of all in the minds of the people. Eminent Ambedkarite Bhagavan Das writes: "Ambedkar firmly believed in social movement rather than political movement. His task was thousand time more difficult than that of Mahatma Gandhi who led the masses to freedom from the British rule which was barely 100 years old whilst Ambedkar led the social movement to liberate the oppressed who had been slaves for centuries. In the

struggle for the freedom of the country Gandhi had the support of the millions of Indians, but in the struggle for liberation of the untouchables millions opposed him. Not even those for whom he struggled and bore patiently the humiliations and accusations hurled at him fully appreciated what he was doing, mainly because of the ignorance and lack of understanding".⁸

Ambedkar wanted to secure national independence which was based on social and economic equity and justice. He wanted to create a new social and economic order in India which would ensure meaningful political democracy. He depicts the ideal society thus: "If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity....an ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. The path of social reform like the path to heaven at any rate in India, is strewn with many difficulties. Social reform in India has few friends and many critics".⁹

Ambedkar actively participated in the three Round Table Conferences held in London in 1930s and declared that the untouchables in India preferred the replacement of the existing British Government by a Government of the people, for the people and by the people. He also prepared the Declaration of Fundamental Rights safeguard in the social, economic, religious and cultural rights of the Depressed Classes. He demanded a special recognition for the Depressed Classes in the future constitution of India. He called upon the untouchables to give up the idea of temple entry and concentrate all their intelligence and energies on capturing the political power which was the master key to their empowerment. He reluctantly signed the Poona Pact on September 24, 1931 which served as the death blow to the cause of Dalits since they were deprived of electing their true representatives to the legislature. He wrote: "Congress was a combination of the exploiters and the exploited. It might be necessary for the purpose of achieving political freedom, but it was worse for the purposes of social reconstruction and economic equity".¹⁰

The fiftieth birthday of Dr. Ambedkar was celebrated throughout Maharashtra and felicitations were showered on him for his historical services to the cause of the Depressed Classes. Almost all leading newspapers appreciated the scholarship, courage and conviction of Ambedkar. The Times of India, Bombay, observed: "Without political and economic power the

Harijans will find it hard to attain social equality, and Dr.Ambedkar has done well in realizing this fact".¹¹ The Bombay Chronicle appreciated that Ambedkar struggled day in and day out over the unending inhumanity to his community and it was no wonder therefore that his devotion to the Harijans was equaled, if not exceeded.¹²

Ambedkar studied the life, mission and message of Buddha comprehensively and pointed out that the real history of India is nothing but the conflict of interest between Brahminism and Buddhism. He observed that there had been in ancient India a great struggle between Buddhism which had ushered revolution, and Brahminism which had launched counter-revolution. He observed: "Today we are in the grip of counter-revolutionaries, and unless we do something very quickly we may bring greater disaster to this country".¹³ Ambedkar led a historical conversion movement in October 1956 and embraced Buddhism because the principles of Buddhism were abiding and were based on equality. It was not merely a religious conversion but a revolutionary movement, the real purpose of which has not been understood by the people.

The press in India is under the total monopoly of the ruling class which is the biggest enemy of the oppressed class. The untold miseries of the weak and the oppressed are not adequately focused by the Indian Press. Ambedkar entered this profession in 1920s as the lone spokesman of the voiceless, penniless and helpless millions of untouchables and weaker sections. He had vehemently criticized the Indian Press Act of 1910 which had put a complete muzzle on the Press. He could not find even a single newspaper which was committed to abolition of untouchability and empowerment of Dalits. Thus, he chose to become the champion of the downtrodden in the Indian Press.

Ambedkar launched a fortnightly paper on January 31st, 1920 under the title 'Mook Nayak' after availing financial assistance from the Maharaja of Kollapur. In the first issued of the paper he brilliantly propounded the aim of the paper and asserted that herculean efforts should be made to liberate the oppressed Indians from social and economic disadvantages. His writings emphasized that it was not enough for India to be an independent country but she must rise as a good state guaranteeing equal status in matters of religious, social, economic and political, to all classes. He went to England to

complete his higher studies but encouraged his followers to continue the paper as the voice of the Depressed Classes in India. After returning from England, Ambedkar started another fortnightly Marathi paper 'Bahiskrit Bharat' on April 3, 1927 in Bombay. He began counter attacks against anti-social justice forces. His paper became an effective instrument of education to Depressed Classes. He placed the views of these sections before government and people and strongly pleaded for socio-economic equality, justice and empowerment in India. He wrote editorial after editorial in a different style and strongly advocated the cause of the untouchables.

Ambedkar strongly exposed the politics of Gandhi and Congress who raised violent protest against the insulting treatment meted out to the Indians in South Africa and to the Indian students in Britain and at the same time denied human rights to their countrymen and co-religionists in India. He wrote that the Depressed Classes would die for that religion which took care of them, but they would not care for the religion which did not care for them. He institutionalized the concept of 'parallel journalism' and set an example by serving the socially weak and the oppressed as a prominent journalist, crusader for human rights and emancipator of the downtrodden communities.

"Ambedkar wanted to secure social-economic independence to his people. The Congress news papers vented their wrath and showered words of abuse seldom on the Muslim leaders but always ridiculed Ambedkar even though he struggled hard for the right cause",¹⁴ writes Dhananjay Keer.

Ambedkar firmly believed in the creation of a welfare state in India after independence. He strongly argued that without political and economic power the untouchables will find it hard to attain social equality and economic independence, wrote the Times of India.¹⁵ He was a democrat to the core and supported the British struggle against fascist forces in the world during the World War-II. He strongly observed that mankind in the world will perish under Nazism. He wrote series of articles and pleaded for due representation to Scheduled Castes who were victims of circumstances in Indian society. He also favored separate electorates in order to ensure the election of true representatives of Dalits instead of the slaves of the system. He signed the Poona Pact against his conscience but prevented bloodshed between Dalits and non-Dalits. He became

the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution by virtue of his scholarship and statesmanship. He drafted the Constitution which provides series of protective and promotional measures for the empowerment of the have nots in India.

Ambedkar remains in the history of India as a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of Indian society and used Samata and Janata fortnightlies as prominent tools of social reformation. He condemned the Indian Press which was used as the tool of manipulation and oppression by the market forces and casteist forces in India. Ambedkar observed: "Journalism in India was once a profession. It has now become a trade. It has no more moral function than the manufacture of soap. It does not regard itself as the responsible advisor of the public. To give the news uncolored by any motive, to present a certain view of public policy which it believes to be for the good of the community, to correct and chastise without fear all those, no matter how high, who have chosen a wrong or a barren path, is not regarded by journalism in India its first or foremost duty. To accept a hero and worship him has become its principal duty. Under it, news gives place to sensation, reasoned opinion to unreasoning passion, appeal to the minds of responsible people to appeal to the emotions of the irresponsible. Salisbury spoke of the Northcliffe journalism as written by office boys for office boys. Indian journalism is all that plus something more. It is written by drum boys to glorify their heroes. Never has hero worship become so blind as we see it in India today. There are, I am glad to say, honorable exceptions. But there are too few and their voice is never heard. The dominant forces have demoralized the people and politics. In establishing their supremacy they have taken the aid of 'big business' and money magnates. The questions which President Roosevelt propounded for American public to consider will arise here, if they have not already arisen. Who shall rule - wealth or man? Which shall lead - money or intellect? Who shall fill public stations, educated and patriotic free men or the feudal serfs of Corporate Capital?"¹⁶

Contemporary Indian journalism is under the control of market forces which are wedded to statusquoism. The present generation of professionals are reduced to that of executives who are required to sell the newspapers and periodicals

at the cost of professional ethics and integrity. Journalism is also shaped by the relations of power and by the institutional priorities within the organizations that employ them. The actions of journalists are constrained by the compulsions and pressures which reflect the vested interests of the market forces which dominate Indian journalism. Experience reveals that the present generation of journalist has become the passive participants of journalism which is converted into a profession instead of a socially accountable mission. Journalism needs to be redefined on the basis of the ideology and practices of Pulitzer, Salisbury, Northcliffe, Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Nehru, Lohia and other champions of professional ethics and justice. It is high time Indian journalism becomes a platform for professional excellence and corporate social responsibility instead of an ingredient of the economic and political power game.

CONCLUSION

Ambedkar entered journalism consciously as the prominent advocate of social justice, professional ethics and public interest. He propagated his revolutionary ideas, views and experiences through his papers and organized Dalits, backwards, minorities and other disadvantaged sections of Indian society. He provided a platform for social revolution, economic justice, political participation and national freedom through his papers. He accorded a place of pride to the freedom of press and freedom of speech and expression which is the mother of all liberties while drafting the Constitution of India. He never used journalism as an instrument of making power or profit. He was wedded to social justice which is the corner stone of Indian Constitution. He condemned the misuse of press to promote vested interests in all spheres of human life in India.

The basic message of Ambedkar works is that control of minds by some powerful individuals, press and other means of communication is bad as such control retards movement. He argued that mind control by the mass media and drug is the awesome reality in Indian society. He vehemently criticized the commercialization of Indian Press and called upon the policy makers to make knowledge free and widen the frontiers of practical social wisdom. It is in this context that the rationalism of Ambedkar is revealed to all of us who prize the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience,

above all liberties. He also advocated that journalism should not be allowed to become the handmade of the corrupt and dominant sections of Indian society. Ambedkar occupies a position of high eminence as the legendary journalistic missionary in the history of Indian journalism. His thoughts are highly relevant in the present times in order to make journalism as an important player in the public life and shape the destiny of India on the basis of humanitarian considerations.

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