

**ENLIGHTENING AMBEDKAR'S NOTION OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND ITS RELEVANCE  
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Assam.***\*Corresponding Author: Dr Jesmine Ahmed****\*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai,  
Assam.***Abstract:**

The profound footprint Ambedkar had in shaping today's India is unparalleled. His impact paved the way for a transformed India with reformed socio-economic structure. His efforts meant for an inclusive idea for the development of Dalits and other weaker sections of the society. Ambedkar had fought for the emancipation of social differences, existing inequalities in caste system throughout his life. He advocated for the education and empowerment of marginalised communities that can develop critical and egalitarian thinking for a better society to evolve. He had a deep faith in giving the labour rights as a means to ensure social justice and for the annihilation of caste system. While analysing different aspects of Ambedkar's philosophy, articulation of interaction with Gandhi is quite remarkable. His role in Simon Commission to representing the Depressed classes in Round Table conferences, chairing the drafting committee of Indian constitution manifests his vision for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Ambedkar's philosophy believes to elaborate that people need a universal moral standard to live in society. His notion of enlightenment entails the ethics of reason is to ensure freedom and equality so as to fraternity can be prevailed in society.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, Caste, Emancipation, Dalits, Inequality.**Introduction:**

A pioneer of social justice, a reformer, a true revolutionary, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's whole life unfolded a continuous struggle against the prevailing societal challenges and ensured radical social transformation. His life's work mostly spent during the pre-independence era and witnessing all inequalities among various castes and social groups. Among the various problems of our country Caste discrimination is one of the serious issues that India still faces. It is caste oppression that has degraded the human dignity of Sudras and the untouchables contributing socially despoiled, economically disadvantaged and consequently discriminated from educational and cultural opportunities. There are many reformers who have been played a very important role in upliftment of scheduled caste in India. In this regard, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891- 1956) held a prominent position among the twentieth century leaders of India who fought against many social evils like untouchability, caste restriction etc. His ideas mainly focus on the welfare of human to be achieved through social and political means. He took upon himself the task of fighting for religious, social and economic equality in the Indian society.

Though he belonged to a well-to-do family but the stigma of being members of Mahar community that was treated as untouchables by the caste Hindus. So from his childhood Ambedkar had faced discriminatory behaviour and become conscious that birth in a particular community could make all the difference in one's status in society. Being an Untouchable by birth, he experienced the same humiliation and difficulties, which every Untouchable had to face in those days. He even denied the

facilities of drinking water, games and mixing with other children at school. After completion of education, Ambedkar joined the Baroda State Service in 1917 but did not get respect and his subordinates would throw files at his table. Later he joined as Professor of Political Economy in Sydenham College, Bombay but resigned from the job. Gradually he deeply realised that distortion of religion and misinterpretation of history and culture did more harm to Indian social life than foreign invasions and domination for centuries. It is for these reasons that sowed the seeds of discontentment of Hindu social system in the life of Ambedkar.

However, this paper analyse the role of Dr. B.R Ambedkar in relation to his social ideas and his significant contribution towards caste discrimination in society and also to what extent Ambedkar's ideas are still relevant in India to achieve social justice, removal of untouchability and to establish equality, liberty, and fraternity.

### **Social Ideas:**

Multifaceted contributions are conferred by him signifies from legal reforms to social activism. As a rationalist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar opine that, 'My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words- liberty, equality, and fraternity. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.' He considered that the religion of the Buddha was morality. The social ideals of Hinduism was inequality whereas Buddhism was equality. He believed that Buddhism was a true religion because it led to a life guided by the three principle: knowledge, right path and compassion. He said, "Buddhism teaches social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. It manifests equality not between man and man only but between man and woman." Apart from this, he is of the view that, an ideal society must be based on liberty, equality and fraternity. He asserted that a democratic way of life cannot be perceived without an ideal society. These qualities are-

### **Liberty, Equality, Fraternity:**

Ambedkar in his ideal society, emphasised the significance of accepting cultural differences. For this, socio-economic inequality must be eradicated. In this regard, Ambedkar considered that all class of people should enjoy equal liberty and then only democratic principles can be fulfilled.

According to Ambedkar, equality may be an unattainable reality. A man's power is dependent upon (1) physical heredity, (2) social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage, and finally, (3) on his own efforts. In all these three respects, people are undoubtedly unequal. However in this case, Ambedkar's question is, whether we should consider them unequal as human beings because they occupy different positions in this society.

In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. One of the ideal principles of democracy is fraternity. Actually democracy is not merely a form of Government but primarily a mode of associated living that have respect towards fellow human beings. His efforts for socio-economic upliftment emphasised the intersectionality of identities and inclusive development. By addressing liberty, equality and fraternity, he provides a fundamental framework for existing challenges of society.

### **Critique of Hindu Society:**

Being a rationalist thinker, he questioned the traditional social order of the Hindu Society in order to build a just and egalitarian society. In his book namely "The Annihilation of Caste", 1936, he strongly

criticised Hinduism and highlighted the several reason to reject it. According to Ambedkar, though Hindu culture is based on ideals of non-violence, tolerance, love and humanitarian service, the social life is suffered by inherent contradiction. The basic ideals of freedom, equality and justice could not be realised in practical social life. He was of the view that it is the gap between theoretical ideals and practical life in Hindu society that was the main cause of consequent suppression for years. Ambedkar criticised the Hindu society for lacking of an organised system of individual's and having a caste with different rights and purposes. That is why in the words of Ambedkar, "Hindu society as such doesnot exit. It is a collection of castes, each caste is conscious of its existence. It is not even a federation."

Ambedkar also criticised Hinduism as its fundamental scriptures, the Manusmriti, and the Vedas, advocate caste system as a divine institution that led to the suffering of the lower classes. Ambedkar condemned Hinduism in his "Annihilation of Caste" as "a religion of rules, compendium of rituals, regulations which are based on the caste ideology of hierarchy and untouchability". Moreover, in 1920, Ambedkar vehemently criticise the traditional Hindu caste system by starting a weekly newspaper namely "Mooksayak"( Leader of Silent).

### **Against Caste System:**

Ambedkar encouraged a social system where everyone is determined by his/her merit or by birth being equal and no one can be deprived because of any ground. He preferred for positive discrimination to safeguard and practiced the rights and liberties of the socially and economically downtrodden people. It is noted that 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. Ambedkar was seriously concerned about caste system and was one the few leaders to tell the world that untouchability is part of the caste system and caste is the foundation on which the Hindu religion stands. His chief aim was to raise the untouchables to their rightful status. He blamed the British for the Dalit's political and economic backwardness and thus dedicating his life to the cause of the Untouchables. He was rightly realised the vital need to meet the social equality of people for maintaining the unity of India that can only possible if the diversity is recongnised. Moreover, Ambedkar believed that without destroying caste system untouchability could not be reviewed. As a form of division of labour that brought about by the caste system is not a division based on choice. As an economic organisation, Ambedkar considered caste a harmful institution as it subordinated man's natural power. Therefore, he stressed the importance of rooting out ideas of high caste and low caste permanently. He advocated that caste system in India can destroy through education and inter-caste marriages.

### **Demand for Equality:**

In 1918, the first All India Depressed Classes Conference was held and many social reformers like Tilak raised voice for the upliftment of the untouchables. But Ambedkar felt that the expression of sympathy for the community within the social structure of Hindu society cannot bring any change in the situation. That is why Ambedkar demanded separate electorates and reservation of seats for depressed classes in proportion to their population. Thus in 1919, he emphasised the need of social equality when Montford Reforms were being formulated. He also organised "Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha" in 1924 for the upliftment of depressed classes and the main purpose of this sabha is to "Educate, Unite and Agitation".

Apart from this, various movements against caste discrimination were organised such as in

1927 satyagraha in Maharashtra with 10,000 followers. In March 1927, first conference of Untouchable took place. The movement against the established Hindu social order and for the protection of rights of untouchables had started at two stages, first in the form of protests and petitions and second, in the form of direct action to use wells, schools, buses, railways and Hindu temple entry movement in 1929-30.

### **Ideas regarding Dalit:**

Dalit is a recent term adopted by the Dalits themselves to indicate the fact that they are the most oppressed, exploited and dehumanized section of the Indian society. "Dalit" does not mean caste or low-caste or poor, it refers to the deplorable state or condition to which a large group of people has been reduced by social convention and in which they are now living. Moreover, Dalits are those who are traditionally known as the Chandalas, the Untouchables. According to the Manusmriti, their very presence seems to pollute everything around them. They are the most despised section. Their interaction with other caste groups was prohibited. Such dogmatic religious teachings were put into practice over centuries. As a result, these religious practices have enslaved the minds of millions of Dalits who would have otherwise been liberal and rational in their thinking and would have also developed an urge to fight for their rights, self-respect and dignity.

However, the present usage of the term Dalit goes back to the nineteenth century, when a Marathi Social revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule used it to describe the Outcastes and the Untouchables as the oppressed and the broken victims of our caste-ridden society. Under the charismatic leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, this term gained greater importance. He believed that any effort to improve the lot of the Dalits should be directed towards uprooting the very caste system itself. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that as long there would be a caste system, there would also be outcaste. He fought against the tyranny of the caste system in all possible ways. He thus organized, united and inspired the Dalits in India to effectively use political means towards their goal of social equality.

### **Differences with Gandhi:**

Though Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar both stood for equality, justice and freedom for all caste, creed but Mahatma Gandhi's views about caste system written in Harijan is quite different from those of Ambedkar. According to Gandhi, "Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that is harmful to both spiritual and national growth. Varna and ashrams are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of varna teaches us not our rights but our duties. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of varna by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a varna. There is nothing in the law of varna to warrant a belief in untouchability."

But Ambedkar totally disagreed with Gandhi in this regard. Instead Ambedkar asserted that "caste system completely ruined the Hindu society. Reorganisation of Hindu society on the basis of varna system was not possible because it was likely to degenerate into a caste system without proper legal control. Moreover, reorganisation of Hindus on the basis of four varnas could prove harmful as it would have degrading effect on the mass by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge." He further added, "A society based on Varna or caste is a society which is based on a wrong relationship."

**Differences on Separate Electorate:**

Ambedkar had differences with Gandhi on the issue of separate electorate and reservation of seats for depressed classes. Ambedkar emphasised that there was no link between the Hindus and the depressed classes so they should be considered as an independent community. In 1927 by the report of Simon commission in 1930 and with the recommendation of Jinnah to Viceroy Lord Irwin and P.M Ramsay Macdonald three round table conferences were organised by the British Government and the Indian National Congress to discuss constitutional reforms in India. On 8 August 1930, as president of the first session of All India Depressed Classes Association, Ambedkar demanded safeguards for the downtrodden untouchables in the constitution. In First Round Table Conference, Ambedkar insisted that the depressed classes be given separate electorate and reservation of seats in Central and Provincial Assembly.

However, in Second Round Table Conference it was emphasised that political rights should be given to all communities in their respective proportion. The British Government agreed with Ambedkar and announced Communal Award for untouchables in 1932. But in this regard, Gandhi strongly opposed Ambedkar and did not support separate political rights for them. As a protest against this decision, Gandhi went on “fast unto death” as recognising it would divide India on communal basis. This led to a serious situation and finally withdraw the demand for separate electorate for untouchables. The consequence was reservation of seats in the provincial and central assembly for 10 years. Moreover, a pact was signed by Gandhi (Congress Party) and Ambedkar representing depressed classes in September 1932 called Poona Pact.

**Differences on Movements:**

In September, 1932, All India Anti- untouchability League was formed under Mahatma Gandhi that was also known as Harijan Sevak Sangh. But Ambedkar did not support that movement due to not inclusion of leaders from depressed classes on the governing body. According to Gandhi, “Untouchability is the product not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. So, Ambedkar formed an organisation called Samata Sainik Dal (Social Equality Army).

**Emancipation and Empowerment of Women:**

Emancipation and Empowerment are a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional process where woman gain greater share of control over resources. But since ages women in India have been facing discriminative position due to the prevalent of patriarchy, the growing caste division etc. In this regard their emancipation become crucial. As woman are an integral part of society their position and development in all spheres are never be neglected. Here lies the great role of Ambedkar. As a pioneer of social justice and an ardent reformer, Dr B. R. Ambedkar's part is noteworthy in determining the social, political advancement of Indian society in general and women in particular. His personal sufferings as a Dalit and his rational thinking, inclination towards western education, made in him the confidence to challenge the orthodox Hindu social order and reconstruct the society based on the ideas of equality, liberty, fraternity and respect for the dignity of all including the women. He held responsible the Hindu social order for imposing a stereotype role to women.

He firmly believed that abolition of the unfair gender issues and uplifting the status of women were the basic necessities of the process of social reconstruction that he aimed at. Consequently, throughout his life he tried for the inclusion of the rights of women in different spheres of life. So he

not only pointed out to their inferior status but wanted to equalize them with men through an extensive inclusion of women's rights in the Constitution of India. Moreover, as a matter of concern, the contemporary social realities that women face today need a deep introspection particularly in gender relations. Thus, in this paper, an attempt is made to discuss the ideas of Ambedkar especially in emancipation of women in society and also analyse how his thoughts and actions become path finding in empowerment of women in particular.

### **Relevance of Ambedkar's Ideas:**

After independence, Ambedkar became the first law minister of the country under congress-led government. He was the chairman of the constitutional drafting committee. He emphasised for the constitutional guarantees and protection for individuals including freedom of religion, abolition of untouchability and prohibiting the all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar's most significant contribution has undoubtedly been the chief architect of Indian constitution based on values of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, and secularism. For preserving the unity and integrity therefore drafting of the Indian Constitution on 29th August 1947 passing one resolution, the Constituent Assembly appointed a 'Drafting Committee' with the seven members including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as Chairman. He 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 these provisions, Ambedkar has been regarded as the architect of Indian Constitution.

Apart from this, Ambedkar is of great relevance to Indian society even today in achieving social justice, removal of untouchability, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy. Ambedkar was one of the few Indian leaders whose work attracts the scholars of Today. His initiatives have influenced various spheres of life and transformed the way India today looks at socio-economic policies, education and affirmative action through socio-economic and legal incentives. He realized that the right of the untouchables could only be safeguard by making constitutional provision. He made a path for legal rights to enact the laws in connection with progress of dalits which could positively change their lives. It is noted that Dalits must be economically empowered to fight out what comes on their way in daily life. As mere political representation and a reservation system used by few Dalits would neither uplift the whole community nor this could support them struggling against the regular curse of untouchability. For this, massive socio-political awareness, economic strength of the Dalit community must be regenerated. Otherwise, they will be struggling in the age-old humiliating system over the ages.

Thus, it has been evident that Ambedkar's constant efforts and intellectual contributions for the emancipation of the disadvantaged people in the society have a generational impact over the years. He relentlessly struggled for a society to eradicate oppression by caste, class and patriarchy that make him

remembered in the mind of every Indian and thereby celebrating ‘Ambedkar Jayanti’ on 14 April every year to pay tribute for all the contributions and sacrifices.

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