

BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR (1891-1956): THE MESSIAH OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES AND THE ZEALOUS CRUSADER AGAINST CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

ABSTARCT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had immense contribution in the shaping of modern India. He led millions of oppressed, to a life of self-respect, dignity, and responsibility. Ambedkar's efforts to eradicate the social evils like untouchability and caste discriminations were remarkable. He was a staunch critic of the Chaturvarna system prevalent in the Hindu religion where the Brahmins occupied the highest position. The leader, throughout his life, fought for the rights of the dalits and other socially backward classes. Ambedkar was a victim of caste discrimination himself as he was born in the Hindu Mahar caste, which was viewed as "untouchable" by the upper class. This made him a strong man and he realized the need to uplift the position of the backward classes through proper education, by publishing newspapers and journals for them and by organizing conferences for them. He even wanted to make them aware of their political rights and therefore demanded separate electorate for the backward classes from the British. This brought him in direct confrontation with Gandhiji who was also a strong critic of caste and untouchability but was against separate electorate. Ambedkar was the chairperson of the drafting committee and played a vital role in framing of the Indian Constitution and he also provided several constitutional safeguards for the backward classes. He has rightly been regarded as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and one of the greatest contributions of Dr. Ambedkar was in respect of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Caste, Untouchability, Chaturvarna, Gandhi

INTRODUCTION:

Among the galaxy of thinkers in modern India, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) stands on a pedestal quite different from others and is accepted not only as a ‘dalit leader’ or only a ‘constitution maker’ but also as a ‘nation builder’, a ‘human rights champion’, and a ‘global icon’. His life seemed to be a perpetual struggle against the social evils like caste and untouchability. He fought all his life to provide the backward classes of our country a position of honour, dignity and self-respect. This article on Ambedkar has been divided into five sections. The first section highlights Ambedkar’s tireless efforts at analyzing the dynamics of caste system in India. He has strongly rebelled against the origin of caste system from the sacrificial dismemberment of the divine man, the Virat Purusha, whose various limbs gave birth to the various castes in the following order – mouth became the Brahmin or priestly class; arms became the Kshatriya or warrior; thighs became the Vaishya or artisan and the feet became the Shudra or servant. The second section deals with his views on untouchability and the main reasons for the origin of untouchability. He strongly condemned the social evil of untouchability and wanted its abolition. The third section deals with his views on the exploitative nature of the ‘Chaturvarna’ system where the Brahmins being placed at the top of the hierarchy humiliated and exploited the ‘Shudras’ who were placed at the lowest level of the hierarchy. He also strongly demanded the abolition of the caste system and its replacement by a social order based on equal status and dignity for all. The fourth section deals with his efforts for the emancipation of social status of the underprivileged, downtrodden and backward classes in the Indian society through a flexible, well-reasoned and multi-pronged strategy like establishing schools and colleges, publication of newspapers and journals and by organizing

conferences for them. He also tried to make them aware of their political rights and therefore demanded separate electorate for them from the British. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution he also provided several constitutional safeguards for the backwards classes. The fifth section discusses that both Gandhi and Ambedkar were great emancipators and humanists and were vehement critics of caste and untouchability but there was a basic difference in the political philosophy and tactics between the two of them. This section highlights the differences in the approach of the two to eradicate the evils of caste and untouchability.

I

Ambedkar's life seemed to be a perpetual struggle and tireless urge to secure for him and for the members of the depressed classes emancipation from the curse of drudgery and untouchability (Jaffrelot 2005: 2-3). Ambedkar thoroughly analyzed the Hindu society before embarking on his struggle against the caste system. Ambedkar began investigating the origins of the caste system more than a decade before Govind Sadashiv Ghurye – the first Indian anthropologist to do so, whose *'Caste and Race in India'* was published in 1932 (Jaffrelot 2005: 31). Ambedkar began his tireless efforts at analyzing the dynamics of caste system in India with his first writing on the subject *'Castes in India, Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development'* in 1917 to posthumously, passing via undoubtedly the best known of all, but very rarely quoted *'Annihilation of Caste'* in 1936. In these and other writings Ambedkar strove hard to demonstrate the mechanisms of the caste system and to identify the unsociability in order to advance his fight for equality (Kapoor 2012: 200). He noted that at the outset, the Hindu society composed of classes which from the earliest times existed in the form of the Brahmins (the priestly class), the Kshatriyas (the warrior class), the Vaishayas (the trading class) and the Shudras (the artisans or the menial class). The fundamental characteristic of this

system was the scope for graduation of an individual from one particular class to another, provided he earned the essential qualities of that class. Gradually, however, these subdivisions started losing their open door character of the class system and became self-closed units called castes. In this regard the priestly class made the beginning by detaching themselves from the rest of the people and through a closed door policy became a caste themselves. Endogamy was the main springboard of caste, and the caste system, according to Ambedkar, crystallized after the Brahmins turned inwards, henceforth refusing all matrimonial unions save those among their own community. This is why Ambedkar defined caste as a 'close class' (Ambedkar 1979: 22).

In his mature writings, and in particular in '*Who were the Shudras?*', written in 1947, Ambedkar conducted a detailed re-examination of the foundational beliefs of the caste system. He applied his mind systematically and logically to the Vedic texts, and in particular to the *Rig Veda* where he found a myth of origin explaining the genesis of caste, the *Purusha Shukta*. The text explains the origin of the caste system from the sacrificial dismemberment of the divine man, the Virat Purusha whose various limbs gave birth to the various castes in the following order: His mouth became the Brahmin (priestly class)/ the warrior (Kshatriya) was the product of his arms/ his thighs were the artisan (Vaishya)/ from his feet were born the servant or Shudras (Jaffrelot 2005: 34).

Ambedkar emphasises that, in contrast with the Old Testament notion of 'Genesis', this cosmology puts not man but the group at the origin of the society: 'It preaches class composed society as its ideal' (Ambedkar 1990: 25). Above all, he regards varnas as complimentary and therefore a means of helping society to 'function'. Such a view of society as essentially conflict free was naturally of Brahminical origin: the authors of this cosmogony, as of all Sanskrit literature codifying social relations were Brahmins. The Varna System owes to them its religious sanctions. Ambedkar rebelled against this scheme which 'not only regards class

composition as natural and ideal but also regards it as sacred and divine'. He also denounced the organicist logic which underlies the *Purusha Shukta* (Ambedkar 1990: 26).

The equation of different classes to different parts of the body was not accidental but it was a deliberate move. The formula of equating different classes to the different parts of the body of the Creator has an advantage. The part fixes the gradation of the class and the gradation in its turn fixes the function of the class. The Brahmin is equated to the mouth of the Creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the Brahmin becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is the noblest of the scale, he is given the noblest function, that is of custodian of knowledge and learning. The Kshatriya is equated to the arms of the Creator. Among the limbs of a person, arms are next below the mouth. Consequently, the Kshatriya is given an order of precedence next below the Brahmins and is given a function which is second only to knowledge, namely fighting. The Vaishya is equated to the thighs of the Creator. In gradation of limbs, the thighs are next below the arm. Consequently the Vaishya is given an order of precedence next below the Kshatriya and is assigned a function of industry and trade which in name and fame ranks or did rank in ancient times below that of a warrior. The Shudra is equated to the feet of the Creator. The feet forms the lowest part of the human body. Accordingly the Shudra is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely to serve as a menial (Jaffrelot 2005: 34-35).

As a sociological historian, Ambedkar did not accept the Aryan invasion of India. After thoroughly going through the Vedas, he opines that there is no evidence in the Vedas of any invasion of India by the Aryan race and there is no racial distinction between the upper caste Hindus and the lower caste people (Ambedkar 1990: 291). He forcefully put forward the view that the Shudras were not dark-skinned aboriginals enslaved by the Aryan invaders, but they were also Aryans who also belonged to the Kshatriya solar dynasty. The subordinate status of the Shudras was brought about by a violent battle between the Shudra King, who was the

supporter of Viswamitra and Vashishta. However, Vashishta was the ultimate winner and the celebration of his triumph was followed by the degradation of the progeny of Shudras to menial ranks that led them to occupy the lowest place in the social ladder. Due to social vicissitudes and changes of fortune, they became degraded from their Kshatriya status. In his opinion, the Brahmins were responsible for the degradation of the Shudras. The technique employed by the Brahmins for the degradation of the Shudras, according to Ambedkar, was that the Brahmins refused to perform upanayana ceremony for them (Verma 1971: 512).

II

Untouchability means pollution by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth in a particular caste or family. It leads to defilement, pollution and contamination. It is believed that the practice of untouchability is peculiar to the Hindu society. Untouchability as a social concept has become embodied in customs and as customs differ so does untouchability. The classes, which are commonly regarded, as untouchables are Chamars, Busadh, Dom, Halalkor, Hari, Mochi, Mushahar. Although they were outside the pole of Hindu society, which recognizes only four classes namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas and Shudras, they were reckoned as part of the Hindu society for political purposes (Kheer 1995: 1). Before the Indian Constitution that abolished untouchability in 1950, the untouchables were divided into three categories namely untouchables, unapproachable and unseenable. The untouchables had different names in different parts of the country. They were called outcaste untouchables namely Pariahs, Panchamas, Atishudras, Avarnas, Antyajas and Namashudras. Their touch and even voice were deemed by the caste Hindus to be polluting. So they had to clear the way at the approach of a caste Hindu (Kheer 1995: 1). According to the traditional terminology, the caste Hindus are called Savarnas and the untouchables are called Avarnas (Ambedkar 1990:

114). There is difference between an untouchable and an impure person. An untouchable's touch pollutes anyone but an impure's touch pollutes only the Brahmins. The touch of the impure causes pollution only on the ceremonial occasion, whereas that of the untouchable causes pollution at all times. The Hindu social structure is based on the theory of Chaturvarna that divides the Hindu society into four parts namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas and Shudras. The people who came after the Shudras are called Antyaja. They are namely shoemakers, jugglers, the basket and shield makers, the sailors, fishermen, the hunters of wild animals and of birds, and the weavers. They are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. They rendered various kinds of services to the caste Hindus. The four caste Hindus did not live together with them in one place (Ambedkar 1990: 147).

Ambedkar believed that before the emergence of untouchability, there was a group of people residing outside the villages, who were known as broken men. Before giving an explanation of the origin of untouchability, it is necessary to know how these broken men who formed a fifth varna came to live outside the villages. Ambedkar gave an elaborate analysis of the factors which led to the emergence of the broken men who we call dalits today. He believed that the primitive societies consisted of nomadic tribes. This early nomadic community in its earliest stages had as its wealth cattle. The cattle had to move from one place to the other so the primitive people moved from one place to another. But later on the art of farming and cultivating developed and accumulation of land gained momentum. These new developments led the people to remain in a particular fixed place. So they emerged as settled communities. The primitive tribes however could not settle at one place at one time. So there was always warfare between the already settled people and the nomadic communities. In such a hostile condition, the defeated tribe was broken into bits and scattered. The defeated tribes who were scattered around had nothing of their own (Ambedkar 1990: 147).

Thus came a group of people known as the broken men, whom we call today the dalits. It was in this critical situation that the settled communities and the broken men struck a bargain whereby the broken agreed to do the work of watch and ward for the settled tribes and the settled tribes agreed to give them food and shelter. As the broken men were aliens, they could not be accommodated within the core village, and they had to live outside the village. So Ambedkar says, the broken men were not admitted within the fold of the varna. These became the untouchables. The difference between a Shudra and an untouchable is that the former is a savarna and the later is an avarna i.e, out of varna. “According to the Hindu order of creation, the word antya means one who is born last, who is born last in the order of creation” (Quoted in Jatava 1997: 41). But to Ambedkar “the term antya means not the end of creation but the end of village. It was a name given to those who lived in the outskirts of the village” (Quoted in Jatava 1997: 41).

According to Ambedkar there were mainly two reasons for the origin of untouchability: concept for Buddhism and beef eating. The emergence of Buddhism and beef eating were said to be the cause of the origin of untouchability. Ambedkar did not have many evidences to prove. Since Hinduism had the practice of caste system broken people left Hinduism and embraced Buddhism. Their acceptance was only to get rid of the caste system and practice of untouchability. When there was a large number of conversion into Buddhism, Brahmins could not stomach it. Brahmins began to hate both, the broken men as well as the Buddhists. They considered broken men very low caste because of beef eating. Since then the concept of the untouchability came into existence. The broken men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were enemies of Buddhism. Since broken men were called untouchables they converted to Buddhism. Hence it is possible to conclude that the root cause of untouchability was Brahmins themselves and their jealousy (Ambedkar 1990: 317). In this opinion, beef eating was the reason for the spread of untouchability. Ambedkar quoting various instances from early

Hindu scriptures asserted that the slaughter of the cow was not prohibited in the early Vedic period. Yajna of the Brahmins was nothing but killing of animals. Manu too did not regard cow as a sacred animal, on the other hand, he regarded it as an impure animal whose touch caused ceremonial pollution. He had whatsoever no objection at all against the killing of the cow. The reason why broken men were untouchables was only because they were eating beef, which Brahmins did not like. Brahmins worshiped the cows (Ambedkar 1990: 320). In order to putdown Buddhism and to regain their lost position, the Brahmins gave up the habit of beef eating and made the cow a sacred animal. Thus the goal of the Brahmins in giving up beef eating was to snatch away their social prestige from the Buddhists. Having adopted this means, the Brahmins declared all those who eat beef as untouchables. The broken men having no choice left their residence and continued their beef eating (Ambedkar 1990: 320).

Ambedkar tried to create self-respect among the lower castes and untouchables and convinced them that there is nothing shameful in their past, nothing inferior or inglorious in their heritage. He also convinced them that their low status was not due to any disability on their part, but it was a result of social mechanism under the influence of Brahminism. His interpretations, above all, convinced everyone that a scrutiny of the religious foundations of Hinduism was necessary (Kapoor 2012: 135).

III

'Annihilation of Caste' is one of the foremost monographs published by Ambedkar aimed at explaining the exploitative nature of caste and calling for its annihilation in order to secure a social order based on equal status and dignity for all. This brilliant piece of thought provoking write up was penned as a lecture to be delivered as the Presidential speech at the Annual Conference of the Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1936 by Ambedkar. The Mandal had

invited him to deliver the Presidential address but after seeing the radical views expressed in the script the organizers became averse to include the speech in the deliberations of the conference. They asked Ambedkar to delete the portions that were offensive to Hindu religion and formed an unnecessary attack on Hindu religious scriptures and practices. On his refusal to make alterations, the Mandal finally cancelled the conference and the speech remained undelivered (Lal and Saxena 2009: 121). Subsequently, it was published in the same year by Ambedkar in the form of a book to 'become undoubtedly the best known of all' (Jaffrelot 2005: 32) the books and monographs authored by Ambedkar.

The main argument of Ambedkar in the *'Annihilation of Caste'* is that the caste system has impaired the strength and vitality of the Indian society which has brought about irreparable loss to the untouchables and, therefore, needs to be eradicated without any repentance. He begins by exposing the nature of the caste system which has been found to be grounded in false notions of division of labour in conjunction with the gradation of labourers as well. Indefensible on the basis of overtly ridiculous notions like biological purity, caste remains an irrelevant factor in so far as economic efficiency is concerned. Rather imbued with inherent anti-social spirit, the system of caste has not only gone to exclude aboriginal tribes from within its fold but also created wedges among various sub-caste groups as well. Consequently, the Hindu religion risks the chance of losing its missionary zeal and any sort of efforts at organizing the people in the name of it is bound to fail. Thus, to Ambedkar, the caste system has been a blot on the Hindu religion and instead of acting as the fulcrum to hold it in the highest of spirit and impeccable ethics, its cumulative effect on the Hindu society is that of a genie out to destroy its own creator (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2009: 85).

As a result, argues Ambedkar "...the effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public life is his caste. Virtue has become

caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste (Rodrigues 2004: 275).

In substance it overwhelmingly negates the idea of an ideal society based on the virtues of liberty, equality and fraternity. The system of caste therefore needs to be understood in a dispassionate and unattached manner in order to get to the reality of things as ordained by caste. Taking his argument to the very root cause of the problem, Ambedkar tries to unmask the hidden pernicious motivations behind the idea of Chaturvarna, as the foundation of the caste system. He argues that as a system of social organization, Chaturvarna appears to be impracticable and harmful, and has turned out to be a miserable failure. Even from the practical point of view, Chaturvarna seems to be surrounded by a number of difficulties like explaining and establishing the basic differences between caste and the principle underlying varna; ignoring the uniqueness of every individual and by bracketing all individuals into just four classes would be like killing the ingenuity of each individual, negating of the idea of a penal system to deal with all people equally; and finally ignoring the position of women in such a system. Ambedkar therefore argues that even if Chaturvarna becomes a practicable system, it is bound to be the most vicious one. (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2009 : 86).

After exposing the inherent fallacies of the caste system and its conceptual construct Chaturvarna, Ambedkar appeals to the people for transforming the Hindu social order. He argues that various methods have been suggested in this regard but most of them appear inadequate in themselves. For instance, the idea of changing the social order by abolishing sub-castes would not suffice as it would not necessarily lead to the abolition of caste. Similarly, inter-caste dining would not succeed in killing the spirit and consciousness of caste. Ambedkar argues, that the abolition of caste, can be achieved only by intermarriage. (Chakrabarty and

Pandey 2009: 86). Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling – the feeling of being aliens – created by caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus, intermarriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindu. The real remedy for breaking caste is intermarriage. Nothing else will serve the solvent of caste (Rodrigues 2004: 288-289).

Ambedkar being a realist to the core raises the question on the chances of success of social reform aimed at annihilating the caste. He is of the opinion that in order to abolish the caste system and bring about social reform, certain fundamental religious notions of Hinduism will have to be denounced. He argues, ‘Caste has a divine basis. You must therefore destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested. In the last analysis, this means you must destroy the authority of the Shashtras and the Vedas’ (Rodrigues 2004: 291). Though these were the pious wishes of Ambedkar, he was quick to realize that such a task would be extremely difficult due to several obvious reasons. He argues that the Brahmins would be the most formidable stumbling block in this context because in a changed social order, they would lose the privileged position that they have enjoyed so far and their vested interests would also suffer. The other castes might also not go for it keeping in mind the two unique aspects of the caste system. In one of its aspects, it divides men into separate communities. In its second aspect, it places these communities in a graded order one above the other in social status. Each caste takes its pride and its consolation in the fact that in the castes it is above some other caste (Rodrigues 2004: 294).

Ambedkar has become an inspiring symbol, a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of India’s dalits, the oppressed, deprived and disposed. He epitomized the relentless struggles of the dalit masses for human rights, dignity and freedom. He argued that at the heart of the problem of untouchability was the caste system. As long as there is caste system, there will be

outcaste. Nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste system, which he believes, cannot be brought about without destroying Hinduism. Ambedkar therefore is of the opinion that the path of destruction of castes needs to be addressed carefully and dynamically. While arguing his case for the abolition of caste through the destruction of religion, Ambedkar feels it is necessary to clarify his position as to what he meant by destruction of religion. While doing so he establishes a fine difference between the notions of rules and principles of religion. He feels that the rules (practical regulations) which justify the exploitative character of the caste system must be destroyed while principles (intellectual norms) of religion may be retained to provide for an egalitarian religious order in society. Hence in any case the doctrinal basis of the Hindu religion must be in consonance with the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity and democracy so that a new egalitarian social order could be built in the country (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2009: 88).

IV

Ambedkar's efforts for the emancipation of the untouchables consisted of a three-pronged strategy: "Educate, Organize and Agitate". His direct participation and commitment to the movement for the upliftment of the untouchables is remarkable. He took different means for their emancipation (Dalal 1998: 12).

(a) Education: A Means for the Emancipation

Ambedkar was convinced that proper education could emancipate the untouchables. The establishment of the *Siddharth College* at Bombay in 1945 and the *Millind College* at Aurangabad in 1951 stand witness to his endeavour to make higher education not only available to the depressed classes but also to put the rails of the administration of such educational institutions in their hands. Ambedkar realized the significance of organized activity to carry

forward his movement. He considered education to be essential for all men and women irrespective of their social and economic status. All men and women must get at least the minimum education so that they may know how to read and write. The primary education caters to the minimum essential need of educating the masses (Dalal 1998: 13).

Education provides strength and opportunity for them to fight against poverty, disease, and backwardness. According to him the purpose of education was to help the students to study the situation critically. Therefore, education should be scientific, detached, and impartial in character. He gave emphasis on promoting education and research in universities rather than converting them into conducting examination and degree distributing bodies (Agarwal 1991: 184). He founded people's Education Society on 8th July, 1945, with a view to advancing the educational interest of the downtrodden sections of the Indian society in general and the Scheduled Castes in particular. He considered education the most powerful agent for bringing about desired changes in society. For him education was an instrument to liberate the dalits from illiteracy, ignorance and superstition and thus enable them to fight against all forms of injustice, exploitation and oppression (Agarwal 1991: 137). Though as an untouchable, he was not allowed to study Sanskrit in his school days; nevertheless, in later days, he himself defiantly mastered the Sanskrit language to study the Hindu-religious books, particularly those Shastras that justified the system of caste stratification of the Hindu society. He wrote several books and through these books he daringly challenged the religious validity and the precepts behind the caste system at its very Shastric root. This created immense self-confidence among untouchables, who were made to suffer from a crippling inferiority complex (Agarwal 1991: 185).

He believed that untouchables had to attain political power. They had to have training in political participation and the electoral politics. With this objective, he established the *Independent Labour Party* in 1936 and the *Scheduled Caste Federation* in 1942. He contested

elections on the plank of these political parties. He gave the call “be a ruling class”(Dalal 1998: 13).

(b) Emancipation through newspapers, journals and conferences

Born in an untouchable Mahar family of Maharashtra, Ambedkar seemed destined to face the indignities and discrimination of the upper caste Hindus and he therefore dedicated his life for the cause of the untouchables. Ambedkar’s work took several directions: the most visibly successful was the awakening and organizing of the untouchables – through newspapers of their own, social and cultural institutes, and widely attended conferences, then called ‘Depressed Classes’ conferences. In 1920 he started a Marathi weekly named *Mook Nayak* (Leader of the Dumb) to propagate the interests of the depressed classes (Kadam 1991: 22). On returning home from London in June 1924 Ambedkar started legal practice at the Bombay High Court. This was the beginning of an active public career where he served as a social worker, politician, writer, and educationist. He came back to India to set fire among the untouchables and began by establishing an association called the *Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha* (Depressed Classes’ Welfare Association) on 20th July, 1924, at Parel in Bombay for the moral and material progress of the untouchables. The aim of this association was to make the untouchables aware of their miserable plight, their legitimate rights and to arouse among them consciousness of their rights. In 1927 he started a paper named *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Outcaste India) to air the grievances of the backward classes and in the same year he also founded organizations like *Samaj Samata Sangh* and *Samata Sainik Dal* to fight for the cause of the emancipation of the untouchables (Kadam 1991: 22). In the same year he was appointed as a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly apparently in recognition of his growing stature of being the leader of the depressed classes. He organized the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 for emphasizing the right of the untouchables to use the wells and tanks like others. The ensuing confrontation with caste Hindus led him to publicly burn the Manu Smriti to express the indignation of the

untouchables for the scriptures sanctioning the indignation against them. The burning of the Manu Smriti publicly and openly was a deed of great daring. It was an attack on the very citadel of Hinduism. After this Ambedkar pursued the matter of the right to water in Mahad for the untouchables in the courts, winning a legal victory years later. In 1930, he led another Satyagraha to establish the untouchable's right to enter the famous temple of Kalaram at Nasik (Pantham and Deutsch 2012: 163-164). In the same year 1930 he started a weekly paper named *Janata*, later renamed as *Prabuddha* through which he endeavoured to educate the people on social, political, historical, religious, educational, economic, and other problems of the downtrodden people of India. His writings breathed rationalism and humanism, and they revolutionized the outlook of the untouchables, completely as never before (Dalal 1998: 12).

He never joined or supported any caste Hindu-led group, although he invited high caste Hindus to serve in his institutes. He firmly believed in the self-improvement of the untouchables, and constantly spoke and wrote against practices (such as, drinking and the eating of carrion beef) which were associated with low caste behaviour, with the corollary that lower classes were capable of exemplary behaviour and self-respect. He was sure that honest and sufficient representation in the governing bodies would enable the Depressed Classes to 'redress their grievances' via legal means (Pantham and Deutsch 2012: 163-164). From 1930 onwards Ambedkar's strategy of emancipation of the untouchables started getting more inclined towards legal-constitutional and political methods in comparison to the radical methods of organizing satyagraha.

(c) Political Movement for the Depressed Classes

Ambedkar believed that by getting the recognition of the Depressed Class as a separate minority community like the Muslims from the British Raj, it would be easier to gain political

power and consequent legal rights of equality and social justice for the untouchables and the outcaste. He, therefore, decided not only to ask for legally recognized status of minority community for the Depressed Class but also for introducing the system of separate electorate for choosing their representations to legislature. From 1919, Ambedkar gave evidence to the Southborough Committee (responsible for redefining the electoral franchise in the framework of the constitutional reforms of the Government of India Act of 1919), up to 1927, when the British authorities appointed him to the Bombay Legislative Council, he steadily developed a case for separate electoral systems, in which only the members of the 'depressed classes' (the term used at that time to designate the people called 'untouchables') would vote for candidates who themselves would come only from the same 'depressed classes' (Mahar 1972: 46). But his inability to zero it on a specific formula failed to provide a particular solution and paved the way for a number of options like reserved seats and separate electorate (Kheer 1995: 40). However when the Simon Commission came to India in 1928, he seemed more interested in reservation of seats in comparison to a separate electorate. Yet during the various Round Table Conferences and proceedings of the Minorities Committee, Ambedkar was apparently weaned away by the supporters of the separate electorate formula in the name of getting more protection for the untouchables (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2009: 89).

The British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald readily accepted the demand of Ambedkar recognizing the right of the untouchables for a separate electorate and announced it in the Communal Award of 1932 (Mowli 1990: 67). The Communal Award was a great triumph for Ambedkar. However, Gandhiji felt it was a threat to divide the Hindu community with a sinister imperialist design to weaken the main base of the freedom movement. The Mahatma, who was then imprisoned at Yervada jail in Pune, started fast unto death to save the unity of the Hindu society by preserving the system of joint electorate for all Hindus. The whole country was anxiously waiting for a positive response from Ambedkar, who was in a dilemma either to

yield to the moral appeal of the Mahatma or stick to the political gains that he thought he had achieved for the Scheduled Castes. Ultimately, he agreed to give up the claim for separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes and consented to retain the system of joint electorate along with the other communities of the Hindu society. Gandhiji on his part liberally conceded to increase the number of reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes from 78, as it was fixed in the Communal Award to a much higher figure of 148. This settlement between Gandhiji and Ambedkar is known in history as the Poona Pact (Agarwal 1991: 185). Ambedkar later wrote concerning why he succumbed to the moral appeal of Gandhiji, “There was before me a duty, which I owed as part of the common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfied to Gandhiji” (Agarwal 1991: 186). After the Poona Pact Ambedkar was looked upon not only as a sectional leader of the Depressed Class only, but everybody expected him to play the role of a national leader by joining the mainstream of the national movement for India’s freedom (Agarwal 1991: 186).

(d) Constitutional Safeguards for the Depressed Classes:

Dr. Ambedkar was appointed the Chairman of the Drafting Committee that was constituted by Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for independent India. The Constitution of independent India came into force from 26th January, 1950, marking the beginning of a new era in the history of India. Ambedkar was a champion of fundamental rights, and Part III of the Indian Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights to the citizens against the state. Some of the fundamental rights contained in Articles 15(2), 17, 23, and 24 are also enforceable against individuals as they are very significant rights relating to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth etc. The text prepared by Ambedkar

provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and outlawing all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar also argued for extensive economic and social rights for women (Rodrigues 2004: 369-381).

The real contribution of Ambedkar is reflected in the Protective Discrimination Scheme or the reservation policy of the government envisaged under some provisions of Part III and many of Part IV dealing with the constitutional mandate to ameliorate the condition of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the other backward classes. Provisions like Article 17 prohibiting untouchability and Article 30 dealing with the protection of minorities are some of the notable examples (Rodrigues 2004: 369-381).

Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of Part III and Part XI, and Schedule V and VI dealing with the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes speak clearly about the substantial and significant contribution of Ambedkar for the development of untouchables. Ambedkar made it his life's mission to uplift the untouchables and other downtrodden masses from the unequal position of inferiority to that of equal position of parity in socio-economic status with high-caste Hindus. For achieving this goal the reservation policy or the scheme of protective discrimination was advocated and implemented by him for ten years at least to ameliorate the conditions of the various depressed and down-trodden sections of Hindu society. Ambedkar might be criticized for showing an obsession on issues pertaining to the interests of the Scheduled Castes. But he could never be accused of not being a true Indian and a genuine nationalist (Rodrigues 2004: 369-381).

Both Ambedkar and Gandhi were heroic and the very embodiment and symbols of revolt against the unjust social order pertaining in India. Both were great emancipators and humanists. But while Gandhi was a reformer, Ambedkar was a social revolutionary and an iconoclast. In the opinion of Prof. Bipan Chandra, “Both share in common total opposition to caste oppression and caste discrimination and were committed to transform the social, economic and cultural conditions of the Harijans (Bipan Chandra, *The Times of India*, 13th April, 1994). Ambedkar too was an enemy of the caste system, particularly of Brahminism which buttressed it, and he too stood for its total liquidation. He believed that caste system would have to go if untouchability was to be done away with. Nothing could emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of caste. Ambedkar wrote a famous book ‘*Gandhiji and Emancipation of the Untouchables*’ in which he categorically mentioned Gandhiji’s tireless struggle for the upliftment of the untouchables (Prakash Chandra 1998: 93).

Although the goals that both pursued were almost the same but there were fundamental differences between the strategies of Gandhi and Ambedkar regarding the probable solution to the problems of untouchability and other vices of the caste system. (Chakrabarty 2006: 102). Both leaders presumably understood that sustainable efforts for social reform were needed to address and remove untouchability which was a social menace. However, while Gandhi continued to view the problem of untouchability as a social issue, Ambedkar gradually got convinced of the necessity of a multi-dimensional strategy for the emancipation of the depressed classes in which winning political rights turned out to be the main objective (Gore 1993: 85). Moreover, the growing tendency on the part of Ambedkar to relate the idea of untouchability to the whole system of, what may be called as the Hindu view of life, which appeared quite close to the heart of Mahatma Gandhi, also apparently brought him in direct clash with the latter, the flash point of which came in the form of the Poona Pact (Kapoor 2012: 94).

Gandhi evolved a socio-humanist approach to tackle the problem of untouchability. Through his writings in '*Young India*' he strongly denounced the practice of untouchability and asserted that no occupation attributes a social status to the people. The uniqueness of the Gandhian approach was that he strongly condemned the practice of untouchability and wanted its immediate abolition but without compromising on the basic tenets of the Hindu religion and the flawless theoretical construct of the caste system, which he praised for saving Hinduism from disintegration (Gandhi 1966: 83). The position of Gandhi, for whom untouchability was "the cancer of Hinduism," is distinct from that of Ambedkar, in that Gandhi thought that neither the caste system nor, obviously, Hinduism was intrinsically bad (Jaffrelot 2005: 112).

There was a basic difference in the political philosophy and tactics between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi believed that only a change of heart on the part of caste Hindus would remove untouchability and this has to be an imminent change. His further efforts for the Harijans (people of God), a name he coined after the Poona Pact, reflects this stress on the need for penance on the part of upper castes. Thus, his approach to the problem of untouchability rested on its eradication through self-enlightenment of the people which was in sharp contrast to Ambedkar's approach of waging struggles for the same. Interestingly, by 1940s, when Gandhiji seemed willing to accept inter-marriage as a means of eradicating the vices of the caste system, he still did not support the eradication of caste as a social unit which brought him in conflict with Ambedkar, whose historical call for the annihilation of caste had become the most cherished goal of his life (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2009: 90). Ambedkar further believed in legal redress of grievances and guarantees of rights, backed by political power on the part of the aggrieved (Pantham and Deutsch 2012: 165).

CONCLUSION

A true democrat at heart, Ambedkar launched his zealous crusade against caste and untouchability and he wanted to reconstruct the Indian society on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He questioned the traditional social order of the Hindu society in order to build a just and an egalitarian society. The Hindu society in his opinion fails to satisfy the test of being a homogeneous society as it is a conglomerate of different castes. Caste is an obstacle in the growth of national spirit. Caste system perpetrates injustice on the lower castes and does not allow progress of the lower castes. Lower castes receive nothing but contempt. This has resulted in moral degradation and demoralization of the lower castes. His message, speeches, statements, and his efforts to publish newspapers, set up organizations and educational institutions for imparting education among the untouchables and backward classes acted as stimulus and allowed the downtrodden to think about self-respect, self-dignity and self-confidence and also helped them to come out from inferiority complex. He had the guts and courage to raise his voice against Gandhi and this speaks about his inner conviction. The main aim and mission of his life was to try to lead the depressed classes towards a higher social, political and economic status and to free them from the Dark Age. He wanted to arm the untouchables with proper political rights, education, and cultural conditions. Therefore as the chief architect of free India's new constitution he provided several constitutional safeguards for the backwards classes and he abolished all forms of discrimination and inequalities based on caste, gender, race or status.

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