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Indian Political Thinker - BR Ambedkar

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Introduction

- **Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was one of the main architects of the Indian Constitution.
- He was a very well known political leader, philosopher, writer, economist, scholar and a social reformer who dedicated his life to eradicating untouchability and other social inequality in India.
- He was born on 14 April 1891 in Madhya Pradesh in Hindu Mahar Caste. He had to face severe discriminations from every corner of the society as the Mahar caste was viewed as "untouchable" by the upper class.

Main Architect of Indian Constitution

- Babasaheb Ambedkar's legal expertise and knowledge of the **Constitution of different countries** was very helpful in the framing of the constitution. He became **chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly** and played an important role in framing the Indian Constitution.

- Among others, his most important contributions were in areas of fundamental rights, strong central government and protection of minorities.
 - **Article 32** guarantees judicial protection to the Fundamental Rights which makes them meaningful. For him, Article 32 was the most important article of the constitution and thus, he referred to it "**soul of the Constitution and very heart of it**".
 - **He supported a strong central government.** He was afraid that Casteism is more powerful at the local and provincial levels, and the government at this level might not protect the interest of lower caste under pressure of upper caste. Since the National government is less influenced by these pressures, they will ensure protection to lower caste.
 - He was also afraid that the minority which is the most vulnerable group in the nation may convert into political minorities too. So democratic rule of 'One man one vote' is not sufficient and the minority should be guaranteed a share in power. **He was against 'Majoritarianism Syndrome'** and provided many safeguards in the Constitution for the minorities.
- Indian constitution is the lengthiest constitution in the world because various administrative details have been included. Babasaheb defended it saying that we have created a democratic political structure in a traditional society. If all details are not included, future leaders may misuse the Constitution without technically violating it. Such safeguards are necessary. This shows that he was aware of the practical difficulties which India will face once the Constitution would have been implemented.

Constitutional Morality

- In Babasaheb Ambedkar's perspective, **Constitutional morality** would mean effective coordination between conflicting interests of different people and administrative cooperation.
- It will help to resolve the conflict amicably without any confrontation amongst the various groups working for the realization of their ends at any cost.
- According to him, for India, where society is divided on the basis of caste, religion, language, and other factors, a common moral compass is needed, and the Constitution can play the role of that compass.

Democracy

- He had complete faith in democracy. While dictatorship may produce quick results, it can not be a valid form of government. Democracy is superior as it enhances liberty. He supported the **parliamentary form of democracy**, which aligns with other national leaders.
- He emphasized '**democracy as a way of life**', i.e. democracy not only in the political sphere but also in the personal, social and economic sphere.

- For him, democracy must bring a drastic change in social conditions of society, otherwise the spirit of political democracy i.e. 'one man and one vote' would be missing. Democratic government can arise only from a democratic society, so as long as caste hurdles exist in Indian society, real democracy can not operate. So he focused on the spirit of fraternity and equality as the base of democracy to bring out social democracy.
- Along with the social dimension, Ambedkar focused on the economic dimension also. While he was influenced by liberalism and parliamentary democracy, he also found the limitation of them. As per him, parliamentary democracy ignored social and economic inequality. It only focused on liberty while true democracy must bring both liberty and equality.

Social Reforms

- Babasaheb had devoted his life to remove untouchability. He believed that the progress of the nation would not be realized without the removal of untouchability, which means the abolition of the caste system in totality. He studied Hindu philosophical traditions and made a critical assessment of them.
- For him, Untouchability is the slavery of the entire Hindu society. While Untouchables are enslaved by Caste Hindus, Caste Hindus themselves live under slavery of religious sculptures. So the emancipation of the untouchables leads to the emancipation of the whole Hindu society.
- **Priority to Social Reform:**
 - **He believed that Economic and Political issues must be resolved only after achieving the goal of social justice.** If political emancipation precedes social emancipation, it will lead to the rule of upper-caste Hindu, and atrocities on Lower Caste.
 - The idea that economic progress will lead to social justice is ill-founded as Casteism is an expression of the Mental Slavery of Hindus. **So for social reform, Casteism has to do away with.**
 - **Social reforms consisted of family reform and religious reforms.** Family reforms included removal of practices like child marriage etc. He strongly supports the empowerment of women. He supports women's rights of property which he resolved through Hindu Code Bill.
- **On Caste:**

The caste system has made Hindu society stagnant which creates hurdles in integration with outsiders. Even internally, Hindu society fails to satisfy the test of a homogeneous society, as it is just a conglomeration of different castes. The caste system does not allow lower castes to prosper which led to moral degradation. Battle for the removal of untouchability becomes the battle for human rights and justice.

Factsheet

- In 1923, he set up the '**Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association)**', which was devoted to spreading education and culture amongst the downtrodden.
- The temple entry movement launched by Dr. Ambedkar in 1930 at Kalaram temple, Nasik is another landmark in the struggle for human rights and social justice.
- Dr. Ambedkar **attended all the three Round Table Conferences (1930-32)** in London and each time, forcefully projected his views in the interest of the 'untouchable'.
- In **1932**, Gandhi ji protested Communal Award of a separate electorate by fasting while imprisoned in the Yerwada Central Jail of Poona. This resulted in the **Poona Pact** wherein Gandhi ji ended his fast and Babasaheb dropped his demand for a separate electorate. Instead, a **certain number of seats were reserved specifically for the 'Depressed Class'**.
- In 1936, Babasaheb Ambedkar founded the **Independent Labour Party**.
- In 1939, during the Second World War, he called upon Indians to join the Army in large numbers to defeat Nazism, which he said, was another name for Fascism.
- On October 14, 1956 he embraced Buddhism along with many of his followers. The same year he completed his last writing '**Buddha and His Dharma**'.
- In 1990, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, was bestowed with **Bharat Ratna**.
- The period from 14th April 1990 - 14th April 1991 was observed as '**Year of Social Justice**' in the memory of Babasaheb.
- **Dr. Ambedkar Foundation** was established by the Government of India under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on March 24, 1992 as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

The main objective of the foundation is to oversee the implementation of programmes and activities for furthering the ideology and message of Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar among the masses in India as well as abroad.
- **Few important works of Dr. Ambedkar:** Mook Nayak (weekly) 1920; Janta (weekly) 1930; The Annihilation of Caste 1936; The Untouchables 1948; Buddha Or Karl Marx 1956, etc.

Methods Adopted to Remove Untouchability

- Creating self-respect among untouchables by removing the myth of inherent pollution that has influenced their minds.

- **Education:**

For Babasaheb, knowledge is a liberating force. One of the reasons for the degradation of untouchables was that they were denied the advantages of education. He criticized the British for not doing enough for the education of the lower caste. He insisted on secular education to instill values of liberty and equality among the students.

- **Economic progress:**

He wanted untouchables to free themselves from the bondage of the village community and traditional jobs. He wanted them to achieve new skills and start a new profession and move to cities to take advantage of industrialization. He described villages as 'a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness, and communalism'.

- **Political strength:**

He wanted untouchables to organize themselves politically. With political power, untouchables would be able to protect, safeguard and introduce new emancipatory policies.

- **Conversion:**

- When he realized that Hinduism is not able to mend its ways, he adopted Buddhism and asked his followers to do the same. For him, Buddhism was based on humanism and believed in the spirit of equality and fraternity.
- "I'm reborn, rejecting the religion of my birth. I discard the religion which discriminates between a man and a man and which treats me as an inferior".

- So at the social level, education; at the material level, new means of livelihood; at political level, political organization; and the spiritual level, self-assertion, and conversion constituted an overall program of the removal of untouchability.

Relevance of Ambedkar in Present Times

- Caste-based inequality in India still persists. While Dalits have acquired a political identity through **reservation** and forming their own political parties, they lack behind in social dimensions (health and education) and economic dimension.
- There has been a rise of communal polarization and communalization of politics. It is necessary that Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality must supersede religious morality to avoid permanent damage to the Indian Constitution.

Conclusion

According to historian R.C Guha, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is a unique example of success even in most adverse situations. Today India is facing many socio-economic challenges such as casteism, **communalism**, separatism, **gender inequality**, etc. We need to find the Ambedkar's spirit within us, so that we can pull ourselves from these challenges.

Other Important Links

- **B R Ambedkar's 63rd Mahaparinirvan Diwas**
- **Secularism**
- **Gender equality versus Religious practices**
- **Basic Structure of Constitution**
- Representation of People's Act- **Part 1** and **Part2**.