

Historical significance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

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Abstract:

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's life is an account of the immense struggle of a man who, despite being born into a family of untouchables, ascended to great heights and left an indelible mark not just in Indian history but also as an inspiration for the future generation. On 14 April 2023, Indians across the world commemorated his 132th birthday and paying honor to such a wonderful figure by highlighting his struggle and achievements for the welfare of downtrodden people, would be an honest tribute to his legacy. His contribution in the fields of social, political, economic, judicial, and educational arenas is exemplary. He undertook the task of upliftment of the unprivileged segment of the society suffering since time immemorial and his phenomenal efforts in the making of the Indian constitution is what carved out a distinguished position for Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar among the renowned architects of the then India.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Dalits, Politics, Constitution, Education, Modern India, Buddhism.

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I. Introduction:-

Born in the Mahar family, on April 14, 1891, at Mhow Cantonment near Indore (now in the Central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh), Dr. Ambedkar was the fourteenth child of Ramji Satpal. He encountered countless situations from the beginning of his school years that made him aware of the injustice of the caste system in our nation and left a lasting imprint on his delicate and sensitive mind¹. His educational competition marked a turning point in untouchables' history in India, and his community appropriately honoured the occasion.

Ambedkar continued his study at Columbia University (U.S.A.) after earning his B.A. thanks to financial assistance from Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, the ruler of the state of Baroda. Becoming the first Mahar to attend a foreign institution was a pivotal moment in his life. Due to his capabilities Dr. Ambedkar received the highest degrees from prestigious urban colleges in the USA and Europe. In a nation that honoured the fundamental values of equal opportunity for everyone, it opened previously unimagined vistas of opportunity and experience for him.² On his return, he was recruited as a Military Secretary in the state of Baroda³, but the stigma of untouchability didn't stop pursuing him. He entered into many professions but, because of his caste, he had to suffer as no one was willing to deal with an untouchable. Even after being highly qualified, he did not get the right treatment from society. He was so offended that he vowed to devote his life to fighting the caste system.⁴ Ambedkar was successful in converting a depressed class movement into a revolutionary movement throughout this campaign.

His movement for the Rights of Dalits and their Empowerment:-

In a country like India, where society is highly fragmented and caste-worn, it was quite natural for a person like Dr. B.R Ambedkar to launch a relentless struggle against all forms of injustice – social, economic, and political. Being himself a representative of the so-called depressed classes in India, Ambedkar dedicated his whole life to the liberation of the depressed classes from the artificial bondages created by the privileged sections of society for their own benefit. Famous social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand

Saraswati, Jyotiba Phule, and others began taking steps to abolish the practise of untouchability before Ambedkar, but it continued unabatedly. It was left to Dr. Ambedkar who led a serious and successful movement against untouchability. It would, therefore, be no exaggeration to say that Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his whole life to the uplift and betterment of the down-trodden and socially backward people of India.

He held debates publicly and formed many associations to break the decades-old chain of the suffering of millions of people. They were barred from entering the temples of worship, denied ownership of land, denied access to common resources such as water from the village tank or well, and upper castes had no physical contact with them.⁵ He became a dedicated campaigner for their basic human rights and a voice for their sufferings and afflictions. The idea of human dignity was fundamental in his mind. Fighting for the rights of untouchables and members of lower castes was his biggest triumph in the struggle against societal ills. He supported autonomous untouchables and members of the lowest castes, as well as quotas for these groups, when drafting the Government of India Act of 1919. Ambedkar created several publications to spread his message, including the weekly journal *Mook Nayak* (leader of the quiet) and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, a publication devoted to educating readers and promoting the rights of untouchables and low castes. On July 20, 1924, in Bombay, he founded *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* (Outcastes Welfare Association) to promote education among the untouchables and raise political and social consciousness among them. He counseled Dalits and Untouchables to "educate, agitate, and organise" in order to secure their rightful place in society and ensure that their demands were met by the government.⁶ Because education and economic progress are inextricably connected. Ambedkar also suggested that the depressed class's salvation rested in 'greater education, higher employment, and better means of earning a livelihood'.⁷ Ambedkar visualized education not merely as a means of livelihood or as a means to raise the 'avarnas' to the status of the 'savarnas', but as a powerful weapon that would help the Dalits to liberate themselves from ignorance and to build up their fight against injustice and humiliation and thus lead them to their ultimate emancipation. In 1928, he founded the "*Depressed Class Education Society*" to promote depressed-class education. Ambedkar established the "*People's Education Society*" in 1945, which marked a turning point in the development of higher education for the nation's poor. To qualified students enrolled in its many institutions, the Society offers scholarships and freeships.

In addition to education, he emphasised character development. He began organising public demonstrations against the treatment of untouchables, such as the burning of the *Manusmriti*, an antiquated Hindu text that maintains the caste system and bans members of lower castes from entering Hindu temples, and the denial of untouchables access to public water sources. Thus, he launched the Temple entry movement at Nasik on March 2, 1930, which continued for years together. This movement awakened the Untouchables of the Indian society against the Hindu Orthodoxy.⁸

He spoke for the downtrodden classes before the Simon Commission in 1928. The British declared the establishment of a distinct electorate in British India for a number of ethnic groups, including the Depressed Classes, at the Third Round Table Conference in Britain in 1932, where Dr. Ambedkar represented the lower classes. Gandhi resisted the proposal vigorously, fasting until death, which led to the formation of the Poona Pact (1932) between the two. Ambedkar was successful in obtaining a large reserved quota of seats for the poor.⁹

His Political Career:-

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891–1956) was simultaneously a national politician, a caste leader, and a supporter of the Untouchables. From the middle of the 20th century until his passing, he served as a leader, mentor, and educator for his caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra. According to the Indian government, he was the Untouchables' principal representative, the Untouchable leader that the Indian National Congress had to deal with, and the person most responsible for India's compensatory discrimination policies against the Scheduled Castes from the early 1930s onward. In his third role, he discussed all facets of India's development, participated in government work on labour and legal matters, and even put some of his personal beliefs aside to contribute to the creation of a practical, broadly embraced constitution.¹⁰

The Independent Labour Party (ILO), which Ambedkar created in 1936 in front of the approaching 1937 elections, was not intended to be exclusive to the Untouchables. Ambedkar made an effort to create a common platform for Dalits, non-Brahmins, rural labourers, and peasants. By the early 1940s, Ambedkar had recognised that his efforts to construct an anti-Congress alliance were failing, so he opted to focus only on the SCs, forming the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942.¹²

Ambedkar's political groups in the 1930s and 1940s swung between a socialist agenda intended to increase his caste base and a campaign to solely preserve the interests of the Untouchables. None of these tactics worked, and Dr. Ambedkar founded the Republican Party of India as a result of the SCF's failures, which would continue to exist after his passing. This was a non-caste-based party-building method.

After being named president of the "Drafting Committee," Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, had the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the Constitution's development. The Ambedkar-designed social and political structure is preserved in the Indian Constitution. During the process of transfer of power, he was

concerned about the political independence of the country, but at the same time, he was more particular about the power to be shared by the depressed classes in the 'Swaraj'.

According to him the vast majority of people cannot continue to be treated as slaves in politics and that it cannot become the exclusive domain of a small group. He maintains that social as well as economic exploitation and degradation are to blame for the suffering of our nation's untouchables and downtrodden citizens. He promoted state socialism, moderated by a democratic foundation, as well as public ownership of land and other means of production in order to liberate the people of India from the tyranny of the society. According to him, political stability cannot exist in our society until social democracy and economic equality are ushered in.

Conversion to Buddhism:-

Ambedkar is considered a Messiah by the lower castes in India. He was dissatisfied with the Hindu caste system, which is centered on hierarchy. He thought that the only way to restore Dalit dignity was through the caste system being abolished. Ambedkar said: *"it is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system is founded."* He was adamant that the untouchability stigma could be effectively and permanently eliminated if Hindu society were destroyed, including the caste system being abolished by an Act of the legislature of independent India, the priesthood being abolished (which was only available to Brahmans), and the scriptures, rituals, and religious practises of the entire Hindu society being standardized. Hinduism, he claimed, "is an old, senile body that has suffered in all its joints from old age and sickness and holds no promise for the suffering mankind, much less for the downtrodden masses of India for whose horrific poverty and miserable condition it is directly responsible".¹² Due to opposition, Ambedkar was unable to accomplish his aim of eradicating the caste system. As a result, he considered converting his religion.¹³

He claimed that the only realistic and practical solution to the Dalit community's problems is Buddhism. He saw Buddhism as a new source of hope for mankind, as well as a new democratic element and social order. As a result, he converted to Buddhism on October 14, 1956 in Nagpur, Maharashtra, before passing away on December 6, 1956.¹⁴ On this day, Dr. Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of Dalits, predominantly Mahars, converted.¹⁵ In a single day, this conversion set a record for the entire world. The idea of converting to a different religion in order to escape the caste system naturally arose from Ambedkar's study of Hinduism, whose singularity and force depended in its claim that social hierarchy was consubstantial to religion in this society. As a result, leaving was the only way to achieve equality.¹⁶

In the country where Buddhism originated, this incident sparked a renaissance. He brought Buddhism back to life and strengthened it after it had been dead for more than 2000 years. The number of Buddhists increased from 2,500 in 1951 to 2.5 million in 1961.¹⁷ This event had such an impact on so many choices that Ambedkar helped to get Buddha Jayanti, Lord Buddha's anniversary celebration, included in the official holiday calendar. He participated in the adoption of several Buddhist symbols between 1947 and 1950, including the lions of Ashoka, the ancient Indian Buddhist emperor, the chakra (wheel of Dharma) on the Indian flag, and the engraving of a Buddhist aphorism on the pediment of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the residence of the President of the Republic.¹⁸

His role in framing the Constitution:-

The creation of the constitution was perhaps India's greatest success after gaining independence. Given India's geography, diversity, and multifaceted issues, it was a challenging task. Dr. Ambedkar's most significant contribution to the creation of modern India was his crucial position as Chairman of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, where he displayed his knowledge, talent, and strength in a way that astounded his doubters and opponents. The most important feature of the

Indian Constitution is its emphasis on fairness, socio-political justice, and economic justice. Additional measures have been adopted to lessen and abolish the various forms of discrimination that women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs experience. These groups' rights are passionately protected. He supported a strong central government, helping to shape Indian federalism as a tool for promoting racial harmony. Regarding the importance of a strong central government with broad powers and the scope of fundamental rights, his unflinching support was immensely helpful.¹⁹ He stood up for fundamental rights. Ambedkar envisioned specific legal protections allowing untouchables to get an education, change their inherited occupations, improve their standard of living, and participate in society in a respectable way. In order to achieve socio-economic parity with high-caste Hindus and to provide them with a place in society where they might live with dignity, Ambedkar sought to free the untouchables and depressed segments of society from their unjustified position of inferiority. To support the various downtrodden and disadvantaged groups in caste system society, he advocated for and developed a reservation policy, often known as a protective discrimination plan.²⁰

The government's anti-discrimination programme recognises Dr. Ambedkar's significant contribution and addresses the constitutional mandate to improve the situation of the weaker segments of society, such as

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as other backward classes. This programme is envisioned under some provisions of Parts III and IV of the Constitution. Untouchability, for example, is prohibited by Article 17 of the Constitution.²¹ Article 30, which safeguards minorities, is among the most well-known examples. Ambedkar's fundamental commitment to the elevation and development of a socially oppressed group is evident in Schedules V and VI, which deal with the uplift and development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

His contribution in shaping Modern India:-

Ambedkar also served as the leader of the farmers movement and conducted extensive research on Indian agriculture, publishing papers, organising seminars, and organising conferences to address the issues facing farmers and the agricultural industry. In his essays "Small Investments in India and Remedies" (1917) and "state-minority" (1918), he discusses agriculture. The "Land Ceiling Act" was passed to address this problem after independence. He also advocated for collective farming, equitable land distribution or the inclusion of the earth in the economy, widespread industrialization, the provision of funds, water, seeds, and fertilisers by the government, the cultivation of arid deserts by giving land parcels to landless workers, the establishment of a minimum wage, and the regulation of private lenders of loans to farmers. After India gained independence in 1947, the government adopted Ambedkar's proposal for a free economy known as GLP (Globalization, Liberalization, and Privatization).

Ambedkar made a tremendous contribution to women's economic growth and advancement. According to him, women's participation in economic development is impossible without the advancement of their social standing and equality. However, terrible economic conditions for women in India are impeding India's economic advancement. As a result, it is critical to enhance women's economic circumstances and provide them with equal rights and occupational freedom. Ambedkar said that the idea of human capital in India is useless unless the dalits and other castes, who are oppressed and destitute, acknowledge untouchables as fellow humans with equal social standing and religious underpinnings. It is unable to use this human resource to boost India's economy as a result.

Ambedkar was a national builder and a world leader in addition to being a Dalit leader. He also formulated the principles of social justice. Because of his outstanding worth and work, his life continues to inspire people to fight against injustice done to humans on the basis of race, class, colour, and religion and to work for their upliftment.

Dr. Ambedkar employed a variety of strategies throughout his life to end caste and, in particular, to liberate the Dalits from this oppressive societal structure. He advocated for a distinct electorate, party organisation, and public policies like reserves in politics. He wasn't afraid to work with the government at the time, whether it was the Congress or the British, to achieve his objectives. Education was his main focus in terms of social reform, and as the Hindu Code Bill demonstrates, he backed both grassroots and state-level changes. None of his proposals were successful during his lifetime; he was unable to establish a distinct electorate, a Dalit or labour party, or pass the Hindu Code Bill; as a result, he became bitter and conversion to Buddhism became a last resort tactic. His impact on the development of contemporary India may be greater than that of any other leader of his day, more than seven decades later. He not only established the groundwork for a silent revolution, but he also helped draft India's Constitution, which laid the groundwork for the country's emergence as the world's largest democracy.²² In 1947, he was chosen to lead the Constitution Drafting Committee. He was an experienced constitutional scholar who had investigated the constitutions of about 60 different nations. The "Father of the Constitution of India" is another title accorded to him. The principles outlined in his book "Problem of Rupee; Its Origin and Solutions" served as the foundation for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). And, while everyone talks about Dr. Ambedkar's commitment to the upliftment of Dalits and his work in crafting India's constitution, his tremendous contributions to nation-building go unacknowledged.²³ Ambedkarism outlines the philosophy of the Dalit movements and is still active today in India.²⁴ In his lifetime Ambedkar was perhaps the lone leader who was more misunderstood than understood. But the verdict of posterity has happily been in his favor. Accordingly, he is now being seen in his true light as a champion of the downtrodden people and a great patriot.

II. Conclusion:

Dr. Ambedkar, esteemed within his community and among Indians, tirelessly worked to uplift those facing caste-based prejudice. Despite encountering societal barriers, he pursued higher education in the US and Europe, a remarkable achievement for his time. He staunchly opposed the caste system, expanding his campaign to fight against broader injustices. As the chief representative of the Untouchables, he advocated for their rights within the Indian National Congress.

Engaging in government work, he addressed labor and legal issues, contributing to India's growth and helping shape a progressive constitution. Throughout his life, he fought against social injustices, advocating for

the dignity and rights of the oppressed. Ambedkar emphasized education as a means to empower Dalits and untouchables, envisioning legal protections to facilitate their social and economic advancement.

Concerned about political freedom during the transition from British rule, he also focused on ensuring power distribution among oppressed classes in the newly independent India. His greatest legacy remains the Indian Constitution, embodying principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Decades later, his impact on contemporary India stands unmatched, particularly through his role in crafting the constitution, which established India as the world's largest democracy.

Acknowledgement:- I declare that this work is entirely original, and that no part of it has been plagiarized or borrowed from other sources without permission. I acknowledge that the material has not been published in any form of publication and is not currently being considered for publication or presentation in any form of publication.

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