

B. R. AMBEDKAR

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Life sketch of Ambedkar

Ambedkar championed the cause of dalits and fought for their emancipation. Nehru considered him as a symbol of revolution against oppressive features of Hindu society. **M. V. Pylee considered him as modern Manu.**

Ambedkar belonged to Mahar caste a lower caste in Maharashtra. Despite belonging to lower caste he got an opportunity to study abroad. He studied law and came to be regarded as most educated man in Bombay. He was also elected to Bombay Legislative Assembly.

His activities

First Phase: His initial work included organisation of untouchables through newspapers and depressed class conferences. He brought petitions to British government for including situations of untouchables and promotion of their education.

Second phase: In 1927 Bombay legislative assembly passed an order allowing untouchables to drink water from public ponds. This was resisted by caste Hindus. In the same year in 2nd depressed class conference he burnt Manusmruti. This conference marks the beginning of acknowledgement of Ambedkar as a leader of untouchables.

Third phase: Ambedkar started becoming highly critical of caste Hindus as well as congress. He started advocating separate representation for dalits. This was

opposed by Gandhi. Gandhi-Ambedkar divide on the issue of untouchables became prominent. Ambedkar signed Poona Pact with Gandhi in 1932. Later on he acknowledged his act as a great sentimental blunder. From 1942 to 1946 he was highly critical of congress.

Fourth phase: Towards the dawn of independence we see a change in views of Ambedkar. He left the demand for separate electorate. He co-operated with congress in the formation of constitution. He was nominated as a chairman of Drafting Committee. He became first Law Minister. This phase is known as phase of political defeat of Ambedkar.

Fifth phase: He became disillusioned with congress. He resigned from government as protest against the defeat of Hindu code Bill in the hands of caste hindus. He realized that there is no solution to the problem of untouchability and caste system. Later on he converted himself into Buddhism in 1956.

Ambedkar's perspective/School of thought: Ambedkar was primarily a liberal thinker. He was Buddhist great advocate of rule of law. He preferred constitutional means for redressal of grievances.

Later on he got influenced by Socialism. He felt that until and unless social democracy is not established, political democracy will not exist. His socialism was "Democratic Socialism".

Ambedkar felt that cause of untouchables can be promoted only by untouchables. His strategy included a mix of social upliftment, political enlightenment and spiritual awakening of untouchables.

Ambedkar's view on caste system:

Deconstruction of caste system:

Ambedkar has attempted an analysis of Hindu socio-religious system. He was moved by the inhumane treatment which his community suffered in the hands of caste hindus. He felt that Hindu social reformers have not done enough to reform Hindu social system. Hence situation of untouchables has not improved. These reformers aimed reforming Hindu family. They focused on issues like child marriage or widow's remarriage. They have not attempted to change caste system because caste system is the ideological foundation of Hindu society. No attempt was made to

rewrite hindu scriptures. He criticized Marxist interpretation of history on two grounds-

- i) history is progressive and
- ii) materialistic interpretation of history

Marxist understanding is not applicable in studying hindu society. Indian history is not progressive it is retrogressive. British colonialism is not responsible for retrogression rather Brahmanism is responsible for it. The change of varna system into caste system was the cause of this retrogression. Secondly intellectual forces have played an important role in the formation of Indian history. It was brahmanic ideology which shaped the course of Indian history. Ambedkar associates caste system with endogamy. Brahmins started endogamy. Earlier Indian society was exogamous. Other castes followed Brahmins. Endogamy made caste system entrenched in wake of Muslim and Christian invasion caste as identity further strengthened. Indian society was not a cohesive but fragmented society. Caste system is a pathological system of Indian society which needs to be treated. It requires radical restructuring of Indian society. It needs to be discarded in a similar manner in which proletariats needs to discard capitalism.

In his book "Annihilation of caste" Ambedkar writes without applying dynamite to Vedas and Shastras destruction of caste system is not possible.

Ambedkar debate with Gandhi

Both Ambedkar and Gandhi believed that caste system is exploitative and is not the original feature of Indian society.

Views of Gandhi

He felt that Varna system is the original features of hindu system. Varna system is a division of labour it is a functional specialization. There is no need of ending this system. Functional specialization is found in all modern societies. Gandhi felt that situation of untouchables can be improved within the fold of hinduism. Gandhi was optimist. He felt that egalitarian society (based on justice) is possible in Hinduism.

Views of Ambedkar

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Gandhi is talking about textual view which is far from reality. Caste system is a contextual view of Indian society. He criticized Gandhi because he himself was not observing varna dharm i.e. profession of Vaishya. This is proof that varna system is an ideal and caste system is a reality. It means caste system is not division of labour but unnatural division of labourer. Caste system is "ascending scale of reverence (love) and descending scale of contempt." Caste system is not based on natural aptitude but as social status of parents. Hence it is neither good economics nor a good psychology or good social principle. Caste system suffers from one serious defect i.e. Karma theory. Karma theory gives no scope for change in present life of man. Hence no scope of improvement for those performing defiling job. Hence only annihilation of caste is the solution.

Other views of Ambedkar as caste:

- He compared caste system with Marxism Ideology of racism.
- He believes that caste system has denied social justice to large number of people.
- According to Lord Inequality is the product of history not philosophy but philosophy of caste talks about inequality because it is based on Chatur Varna.
- He compares hinduism with Nietzsche's theory of superman.
- Hinduism leads to go ignorance, it prohibits large number of people from studying Vedas.
- Hinduism is against fraternity because it considers inter caste marriage as adultery.
- Hinduism is heaven for superman and hail for masses.
- Hinduism is not even opium of masses it separates individual from god. It has no nourishment for human soul.
- Vedas are not product of great intellect but they are product of primitive man.
- Religion which regards self respect as sin is not religion but sickness. A religion which allows to touch animal fowl but not fellow being is madness. Religious which preaches unlearned man to remain unlearned, poor to remain