



Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Vision of An 'Ideal' Society

Aditi Sharma

Temporary Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara

Abstract

The works of B. R. Ambedkar present a transformative vision aimed at reorganizing Indian society through the eradication of caste and the creation of an egalitarian social structure based on principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This paper provides a critical analysis of Ambedkar's idea of an "ideal society" as detailed in his influential text *Annihilation of Caste* and other related writings. By placing his ideas within the socio-religious framework of the entrenched Hindu caste system, the study examines how scriptural texts, notably the Vedas and Shastras, sustained hierarchical inequality and justified social exclusion. Utilizing Ambedkar's critique of caste as a system founded on "dogma and predestination," the paper emphasizes its function in dehumanizing marginalized groups and stifling individual autonomy. The analysis also delves into Ambedkar's interaction with Western liberal philosophies and the principles of the French Revolution, which shaped his focus on moral equality and personal dignity. By exploring significant historical events such as the Mahad Satyagraha, the paper highlights Ambedkar's action-oriented approach to societal change. Furthermore, it discusses his philosophical reimagining of religion through Buddhism, especially in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, where ethical conduct supersedes divine command as the basis for social morality. Thus, this paper posits that Ambedkar's vision of an ideal society transcends mere theoretical abstraction; it represents a vibrant, democratic paradigm centered on human rights, social advancement, and communal welfare. His emphasis on the interconnectedness of liberty, equality, and fraternity remains a compelling framework for tackling modern social injustices and envisioning a fair and inclusive society.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Caste System, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Social Justice, Buddhism, Human Rights

The writings of Dr. Ambedkar have always insisted on bringing about a change in the society, in terms of the suspension of the pre-existing caste system in the society. The entire oeuvre of his work can be seen as an attempt to abolish the stratification of the society on the basis of class structure and thereby establishing a casteless or ideal society based on the notions of equality and freedom. His exposure to the western education led him to fight against the Hindu society's evils. He spent his entire life in eradicating the inequities of the caste and the Varna system and that of untouchability. Being himself an untouchable, he experienced the ugly and demoralizing practices of the institutions of caste that encouraged him to rebel against the caste system. He opined that the caste and untouchability have no place in any civilized and cultured society. Therefore he strived hard to put an end to this corrupted system. Ambedkar himself said that 'Ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity.' (Ambedkar, *Annihilation of caste* p. 57) Hence to comprehend DR Ambedkar's vision of an 'ideal' society, we have to understand the meaning of these three expressions. Moreover, it's also important to scrutinize the context out of which a need for a just or ideal society arose, and for that we ought to look deep into the existing nature of the Indian society. In his various works, he has discussed about the peculiarity and rigid nature of Hindu social order. Another point which is tacit in Ambedkar's writings is that besides being a constructive critic, he was an eminent thinker too. "An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change-taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis." (Ambedkar, *Annihilation of*



caste,p.57).Thus he wanted to weed out the social irregularities prevalent in Hindu religion and establish a casteless society where even untouchables can express themselves freely without feeling socially constrained.

One of the major factors that led to the deteriorated condition of the untouchables was the fundamental teachings of the Hindu religion which are contained in their sacred text Vedas. These teachings put Brahmins on a higher pedestal and consequently untouchables are compelled to regard Brahmins as superior to them and to some extent even Godlike. The feeling of reverence is innately generated in the minds and hearts of the untouchables for the Divine Shastras and as a result they can neither question it nor deny it. The moment an individual is imbued with these sentiments, he becomes an upholder and protector of what he regards as something sacred. And this is exactly how Hindus have molded the matter of caste. They gave caste a place in the Vedas because of which people developed a notion that caste deserved veneration as they can't defile the teachings of their religious texts. Casteism is basically needed by the class of Supermen called Brahmins to subjugate the lowly-born menial classes. The caste theory encourages a Brahmin to develop his intellect, and is not permitted to labor instead he is instructed to demean labor, whereas the shudra is required to labor and not allowed to enhance his intelligence. This vicious system attempts to assign tasks to individuals, not on the basis of their mental aptitudes and original capacities but on that of the social ranks of their parents. According to Ambedkar, "this system is based on 'Dogma and Predestination'. Division of labor which it brings about is not a division based on choice, as individual sentiments and preferences have no place in it."(Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste", p.48). As a result it decouples intelligence from work and intensifies scorn for labor. Rules are man-made social constructs of convenience whereas principles goes beyond stringency as they are salutary methods of judging things and even Ambedkar believed that "Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It can't be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be a religion, as it kills the responsibility which is an essence of a true religious act". Graded inequality seems to be the core of Hindu society. That is why Ambedkar vehemently denounces it. "Hindu society is a myth. It doesn't exist."(B.R Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste", p.80). Ambedkar was tremendously influenced by the values of the French Revolution. He was a firm believer of social equality, of which he learnt from the western philosophy. Ambedkar's ardent individualism gets reflected in his support of French and American Egalitarianism. His inclination towards individualism however gets articulated in his criticism of caste system which segregates the society on the basis of birth group at the same time curtailing the individual identity.

The events of December 24,1927 have been often compared with Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March because on this significant date Ambedkar addressed The Mahar Conference demanding that Hindu society "should be reorganized on two main principles-equality and absence of casteism". An adoption regarding human rights stemmed up with deep vigor, visibly proclaiming that "all men were born equal and continued to be so till death". Ambedkar and his compatriots denounced The Manusmriti, ushering a new epoch of social rebellion. Dhanjay Keer aptly describes this event as "one of the greatest sacrilegious blows ever since the days of Luther upon the egoistic bigots, custom-mongers and no-changers on the earth". In his book, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission", (p.41), Keer depicted this event by the statement, "Mahad thus became the Wittenberg of India". The three significant features of Mahad Satyagraha are elaborated as follows: First, it paved an enlightening path where Ambedkar rose up to be a striking figure of the shudra masses, second, it protested against the worst aspect of Hindu hegemony wherein the access to mere drinking of water was denied. Third, Mahad Satyagraha emerged with a strong protest challenging the very hollow foundations of Hindu Hegemony. The statement which he gave to broadly define his movement was, "Why we fight, he asked. It's not simply for drinking water, drinking the water will not give us much. It's not even a matter of our human rights, though we fight to establish the right to drink water. But our goal is no less than that of French Revolution. This was fought for the reconstruction of a new society, for the eradication of the old society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. This is our goal".



In his numerous writings, Dr. Ambedkar has enunciated about the nature of a society, with which he wanted to replace the existing static caste system. For his 'Ideal society', he gave two essential principles: "The first is that the individual is an end in himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and the development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary. The second essential is that the terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity". (Ambedkar, 'The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles' p.95) The main point which Ambedkar expresses here is that in the conventional caste system, an individual had no say, but in his proposed society, he has given the most prominent place to an individual as he is the final end. There was no scope for an individual to mingle with the other classes because of the stagnant nature of existing social order which was deeply entrenched in the Varna system. That is why the objective of Ambedkar's envisioned society is to uphold the individual's human rights. In order to decipher the basic nature of Ambedkar's proposed society, we need to look into the meaning of liberty, equality and fraternity, because these are the three key components required for constituting his 'Ideal Society'.

LIBERTY: Dr Ambedkar has discussed the meaning of Liberty in his various masterpieces. He has divided Liberty into two categories, namely Civil Liberty and Political Liberty respectively. Under the Political Liberty, he has discussed three different fields that form an integral part of our constitution as we know it today. These were liberty of movement, speech and action. Political liberty mainly emphasized on the participation of people in the making or unmaking of the government and the framing of constitution.(Ambedkar, "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles", p.98) he also added that Liberty should be in coexistence with three social conditions namely social equality, economic equality and the access to gain knowledge(education)made available to all because these three social conditions were of primary importance for establishing an egalitarian social order.(Ambedkar, "Philosophy of Hinduism", p 38-9)

EQUALITY: Dr Ambedkar asserted that all the human beings may not be equal pertaining to their "physical strength, in artistic skill, in material wealth, or mental capacity", but still "human beings possess, in degree and kind, fundamental characteristics that are common to humanity." "The nature and manifestation" of "the fundamental characteristics" that 'appear in all human beings' are recapitulated in the phrase 'moral, equality'. Hence 'in essence the phrase "moral equality" asserts in ethical value, a belief to be sustained, and recognition of rights to be respected'. Because 'a society without any respect for human personalities is a band of robbers.' (Ambedkar, 'The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles', (p.96-7)

FRATERNITY: Along with liberty and equality, Fraternity was also the foundation stone of Ambedkar's 'ideal society'. Ambedkar considers 'Fraternity' as one of the vital prerequisites of an ideal society. He says "Fraternity is the name for the disposition of an individual to treat men as the object of reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with the fellow beings. This statement is well expressed by Paul, when he said 'of one blood are all nations of men. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female; for yet are all one in Christ Jesus'. Equally well was it expressed when the Pilgrim Fathers on their landing at Plymouth said: 'We are knit together as a body in the most sacred covenant of the Lord...by virtue of which we hold ourselves tied to all care of each others' good and of the whole'. These sentiments are of essence of fraternity. Fraternity strengthens socialites and gives each individual a stronger personal interest in practically consulting the welfare of others". (Ambedkar, "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles", p.97-8)

In his Magnum Opus, "Buddha and his Dhamma", Ambedkar found religion as a medium to delineate the preaching of Buddhism in a manner which could act as an effective tool in shaping the minds and eradicating the ills of the society. Also known as "The Buddhist Bible", it covers the life and persona of the



Buddha and offers a rational elucidation of The Dhamma. Dr Ambedkar says that “The first distinguishing feature of Buddha’s teachings lay in the recognition of mind as the centre of everything. Mind precedes things, dominates them, creates them. If the mind is comprehended, all things are comprehended. The mind is the leader of all its faculties. The first thing to attend to is the culture of the mind”. (Kadam, K.N., Dr Ambedkar and the significance of his movement) Harmonizing with Buddhist ideology, Ambedkar gave sole importance to mind rather than soul. The belief in eternal soul is fruitless and it only ends in creating suspensions. He neither gave importance to god nor to the soul in a religion. Thus there is no point in trying to seek the salvation of soul. Though the relation between God and Morality was not quite integral but the relation between religion and morality was of paramount importance. As stated by Ambedkar, “In place of God (in Buddhism) there is morality”. There is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices in Dhamma. ‘Morality in Dhamma arises from the direct necessity for man to love man. It does not require the sanction of god that man has to be moral.’ “Morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is Morality”. (Ambedkar, The Buddha and His Dhamma, p.322-23) Later he equates morality with Fraternity, which guarantees the principles of Liberty and Equality. (The Buddha and his Dhamma, p.234) As he says that “The purpose of Dhamma is to reconstruct the world.”(The Buddha and his Dhamma, p.321) “Buddhism was a great revolution”, says Dr Ambedkar, “It was as great a revolution as the French Revolution. Though it began as a religious revolution, it became more than a religious revolution. It became a social and political revolution.”After his enlightenment Buddha had discarded the system of graded inequality in the name of caste, the evil system which had exploited and suppressed the great majority of Indian Population. He didn’t believe in the conceptions of Karma or Punarjanma. ‘It is no use searching for God or devil elsewhere, when you can find either of them in man: either a man leading a virtuous life (*saddharma*) or a man leading a vicious life (*adharma*). It is in the very hands of man to convert this very earth into heaven or hell; and you cannot find them anywhere else’. As Dr E.V Chinniah says, “Buddha stood for democracy, for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the three basic tenets of the Indian Constitution which were originally propounded by Buddha.” That is why in 1950 Dr Ambedkar declared that “Buddhism is the only religion which the world can have”. Because it is in accord with science, it recognizes the fundamental tenets of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, and it does not ennoble poverty.

It is sheer humanism that motivated Ambedkar to take to human rights movement. His life history reflects the relentless struggle of the underprivileged community in our society, against social ostracism and economic exploitation. Mahatma Gandhi aptly described him as ‘a man who has carved out for himself a unique position in society’. Ambedkar preached the dalits to stand for their rights because liberty is never granted or favored, one has to fight for his right and attain it. Ambedkar compares himself with Moses who liberated the Israelites from forced labor, thus ending their servitude by leading them to Palestine. Quite like Moses, who was educated by a prince, Ambedkar was also provided education from Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. The affinity among the two is further established by the fact that took the initiative of freeing their people from bondage, gave them religion and law and brought them to the Promised Land. Thus Ambedkar, just like Moses catalogued, expanded and deciphered the code of laws of nation. His perseverance, self-reliance, self-dependence, courage and unselfish service have given a constant inspiration to his fellowmen.

Works Cited:

- [1] Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. *Annihilation of Caste: With a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*. Dalit Sahitya Akademi, 1987.
- [2] Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. People's Education Society, 1974.
- [3] Ambedkar, B. R., and Hari Narake. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches*. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.



-
- [4] Ambedkar, B. R., and M. G. Bhagat. *Philosophy of Hinduism*. Samyak Prakashan, 2016.
- [5] Kadam, K. N. *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Emancipator of the Oppressed*. Popular Prakashan, 1993.
- [6] Keer, Dhananjay. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 2018.
- [7] Massey, James. *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: A Study in Just Society*. Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2003.
- [8] Mungekar, Bhalchandra. *Dr. Ambedkar's Approach to Buddhism: Towards a Socio-Cultural and Democratic Revolution*. Published by Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Social and Economic Change in Association with Northern Book Centre, 2010.
- [9] Patil, V. T. *Studies in Ambedkar*. Devika Publications, 1995.