

Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar and his role in Nation-Building for Modern India

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Abstract:

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji (Babasaheb) Ambedkar is seen in many lights, such as the champion of the Dalit cause, a traditional reformer, an anthropologist, a political leader, a constitutionalist, a historian, and many more. However, his intellectual acumen cannot be condensed into a few terms; because all his strides in life were in itself an igneous testament of time. Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar's ideal revolved around the notion of providing social justice to the "the last, the lost and the least", since he supposed that there could be no successful nation lest every individual within it were equal. Being a politician from the marginalised sect, he was also most critical of the mainstream political discourses due to the lack of minority representations at the higher levels. His ideas and philosophies are still ignored by the academic sphere, citing them as too polemic. But upon further detailed research, his life can be divided into eightfolds which have invoked myriad approaches toward nation-building. Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar's work shaped the contours of modern India which offers this collection of vantage points for continual reflection on concerns of social justice and its relation to other values. This is predominantly pertinent or might be indispensable, in contemporary times, not only in India but also across the world.

Keywords: Nation Building, Social Upliftment, Empowerment, Constitutional Morality, Pragmatism

Introduction

Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar was one of the original pioneer figures who was assigned the arduous task to Draft the Indian Constitution because of his proficiency in legal jurisprudence. He was a constitutional expert (and a constitutionalist) at par with stalwarts dominating the international field of such eminence. He was deeply committed to democratic modes of resolving socio-political discords. He understood democracy to be a political association of equal and free citizens defining itself in the times to come. He was committed to designing democratic institutions for the new India. Apart from Dr. Ambedkar, six other members of the committee to Draft aided to delineate our Constitution. They laid down the basic principles of basic political code, structure, procedure, powers, and duties of constitutional pieces of machinery. In this vein, as a Chairman, Dr. Ambedkar defended the Draft constitution that the committee prepared, and thus it was his intervention in almost every debate.

Methodology

This article seeks to give a holistic purview of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar's role in Nation Building. It analyses the major paradigm shifts inoculated by Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar for creating a just and humane society along with the process of social upliftment of the poorest of the poor through social engineering. This article is compiled through secondary data analysis of available books, journals, government websites, newspapers and articles to develop a neoteric understanding of the towering

intellectual figure of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar. Furthermore, content analysis of the secondary data was employed to interpret and code all realistic conclusions from all the available sources.

Results & Discussions

Father of the Indian Constitution

This is the very first role that comes synonymous with the name of Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar's speech galvanised masses from all sections of Indian society and was very insightful with proper rationale and was conscientiously researched (Rodrigues, 2002). This created an aura around him that was appreciated and respected by the other members of the assembly who consented to him leading the Drafting Committee. His knowledge of jurisprudence and various constitutions of different countries was very beneficial in outlining the Constitution in two years, eleven months, and eighteen days (Laxmikanth, 2016). He was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. In due course of this total time period, it held eleven sessions covering around 165 days. In this context, about 114 days were spent on the consideration of the Draft Constitution of India (Laxmikanth, 2016). For all his efforts as the Chief of the Committee to Draft and his defence presented towards the Constitution, he is often regarded as a "chief architect" of the Indian Constitution. For such a feat he was belatedly awarded Bharat Ratna in the year 1990 (Ahir, 1990). He is, in the truest sense, one of the founding fathers who laid the foundation of liberal democracy in the country. Therefore, he is the maker and conscience-keeper of India¹. Furthermore, his ideas planted the seed of expectation towards the state for ensuring welfare measures in the interest of weaker sections of society for their empowerment which is evident in all bills and acts passed in the Parliament of India.

Building a Just Society

His second role was based on his own principle of annihilation of caste and building a just society for all. The Poona Pact (1932) between Gandhiji and Ambedkar guaranteed a neutral simulacrum of the so-called untouchables (lower classes) in the public services while allotting a slice of the educational scholarship for their elevation in social rank (Omvedt, 2017). His encouragement for voting rights safeguarded that woman had the right to vote right after freedom from the British Raj. Furthermore, as the Chairman of the Constitution's Drafting committee, he placed distinct weightage on the already present western notions of dignity, unity, freedom, and rights for all citizens. The date November 25, 1949, wherein our Constitution was implemented, Dr. Ambedkar fervently contended that India must strive to be a social democracy and not merely a political democracy. He opined that "social democracy is a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life" (Ambedkar, 1979). As per Dr. Ambedkar, constitutional morality can only be realised through an administration that is in confluence with the spirit of the Constitution and through inculcating the constitutional ethos among the populace, by defeating the social evils such as casteism, bigotry, patriarchal mindset and so on. Through following the constitutional authorities, earlier dynamics of revolutionary and extra-judicial methods need to be discarded, as they represent the 'grammar of anarchy' in the purview of Dr. Ambedkar. In order to further the maxims of the Constitution, our

¹MEA. (n.d.). *Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Maker and conscience-keeper of modern India*. Retrieved October 20, 2021, from <https://www.mea.gov.in/about-amb.htm>

country requires strong and credible institutions to maintain the checks and balances, so that the power is not centralised around one figure. The strengthening of institutions is essential to prevent the creation of an authoritative regime, one which is driven by the notions of hero-worship, which Dr. Ambedkar strongly warned against in his seminal speech to the Constituent Assembly. In this vein, one of the towering bodies created by our Constitution is the Indian judicial system which acts as one of the three central pillars of our democracy. And, constitutional morality is often invoked by the judiciary to strike down laws which are in violation of fundamental rights such as the criminalisation of same-sex relations or treatment of wife as husband's chattel and so on.

Moreover, Dr Ambedkarencouragedthe process of social equitability and social justice in every field such as socio-economic, political and so on. He considered that social justice intendedthe highest amount ofcheerfulness to the highestnumber of individuals. As per him, in the case of India, where the social order is alienated on the foundation of caste, religion, language, and other influences, a shared moral compass is the need of the hour, and the supreme law of the land can play a significant role in the functioning of that compasseffortlessly (Rodrigues, 2002).

Distinguished Economist

His third role as a distinguished economist shaped the contours of the Indian economy. Dr.Ambedkar was the first individual of Indian origin to receive a degree titled Doctor of Philosophy in Economics from a foreign university. He earned doctorates both from Columbia University (National dividend of India: a history and analytical study [1916]) and the London School of Economics (The Problem of Rupee: its origin and its solution [1923])(Prakash, 1992).This was truly a feat which is still unimaginable for a person to accomplish even in modern times.

Nevertheless, Dr. Ambedkar developed a pragmatic view on the relative ability of the state and the market to achieve social, political and economic justice. The turn to market-oriented reforms in India and elsewhere poses new challenges to the social vision that Dr. Ambedkar bestowed. His PhD thesis "The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution" aided in the conceptualisation of the Hilton Young Commission on Indian Currency and Finance (1926). This commission was directed towards the formation of the Reserve Bank of India (1935) through the RBI Act, 1934². Furthermore, he was also one of the initiators of constituting Employment Exchanges in our country. All of these facts added respect, glory and dignity to the illustrious personality of Dr. Ambedkar.

Role in Water Resources Development

The fourth role propagated by Dr. Ambedkar aided in constituting the Central Water Irrigation and Navigation Commissionin our country. This was primarily done by establishing the river valley venturesuch as the Damodar River Valley Project, the Sone River Valley Project, the Mahanadi (Hirakud Project), and so on(Thorat, 1998).All of the aforesaid projects were his brainchild.

²RBI. India. (2008, April 16). *The Global Partner: Introductory Remarks by Dr. Y.V. Reddy, Governor, Reserve Bank of India at the World Leaders' Forum, Columbia University, New York.* https://rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_SpeechesView.aspx?Id=387

In his initial childhood days, he was stopped from drinking water from public wells. So he constituted these bodies to effectively ensure drinking water for all. He was also responsible for introducing the Power and Water policy and providing a role to the Union government in the two key sectors. He brought the production of electricity under the control of the government. Furthermore, acts such as Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956, and the River Board Act, 1956 stemmed from Babasaheb's farsightedness on such issues. In this vein, Dr. Ambedkar can be also called the father of the democratisation of water bodies for all the Indian populaces.

Role as a Labour Leader

His fifth role as a Labour Leader can be evidently seen through his act of being a champion of the Dalit cause. His speeches moved and empowered masses from the marginalised classes on every international and national podium. As their spokesperson at the Round Table Conference, he advocated the issues related to labourers and enhanced peasants' state. He was appointed as a participant of the Bombay Assembly. Ambedkar condemned the summary of the Industrial Disputes Bill, 1937, as it detached the workers' right to strike. As a labour participant, he supported promoting "fair condition of life of labour", an alternative to securing "fair condition of work" which became the rudimentary outline of the future government's labour plan. In the political context, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar fashioned the Independent Labour Party (ILP), in August 1936 which secured 13 seats out of 15 seats held in reserve for Dalits in the Bombay Assembly. In 1937, the slogan 'Jai Bhim' was first introduced by Babu L.N. Hadras of the ILP from Nagpur.

Moreover, India was one of the forerunners who started thinking about instituting just and fair conditions for workers, herein Dr. Ambedkar successfully led the struggle for reducing working hours from 12 to 8 hours in the year 1942. After Independence from British Raj in 1947, to overcome the problem of the agrarian crisis, he highlighted the need for nationalisation of land and the concept of public sector industries (Meghwal, 2020). His commitment to labour rights is explicitly present under article 19(c) which guarantees the fundamental right to form associations or unions. In similar veins, in the current context, most of the labour laws practised in India now were outlined by Dr. Ambedkar, in the interest of the working class, when he was Union Labour Minister.

Vision for India's Agricultural Crisis

His sixth role can be observed through his actions of envisioning the upliftment of the agrarian class. His composition "Small Holdings in India and their Remedies (1918)" anticipated industrialisation as the riposte to India's farming-related issues (and even the class problem) and is still pertinent to current deliberations. Dr. Ambedkar as a member of the Cabinet and committed to the principle of collective responsibility worked hard on the draft of the First Amendment [which was the source of modification in Article 31 (right to property) and enabled restrictions to be placed on Article 19 (right to free speech)]. He was the first lawmaker in the country to announce a Bill for eliminating the vassalage of agrarian renters, i.e., the Land Ceiling Act after Independence.

Role in Ensuring Gender Parity

His seventh role was in ensuring gender parity amongst the rural and urban masses. He was one of the most prominent voices of women's empowerment wherein in his first paper (1916), Dr. Ambedkar elucidated the role of women in the Indian society. In this vein, Dr. Ambedkar noted that women in

ancient times held a higher position, but a paradigmatic shift led by a patriarchal state of mind perpetrated by the doctrines of Manusmriti inoculated these newer dynamics. So, newer changes which led to the decline caused prohibition in the educational sphere, property and so on.

Dr. Ambedkar initiated pragmatic reforms for the lessening of working hours to 48 hours per week, thereby removing the embargo on the engagement of women folks in various forms of employment. Further, numerous provisions such as overtime, paid leave, and minimum wage were introduced. He also aided in founding the code of "equal pay for equal work" notwithstanding gender and parenthood reimbursements. His support of the Hindu Code Bill was a watershed moment in his life which was towards upgrading women's predicament by giving them the basic right to adopt and inherit. However, all detached parties from the right united to defeat the bill as well as to denigrate and attack Dr. Ambedkar personally. In due course, when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru himself withdrew support from the bill due to political expediency, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet.

Role as a Social Reformer

His eighth role as a social reformer is the most important one. Dr. Ambedkar established the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha in 1924. His active role in Mahad satyagraha, wherein Dr. Ambedkar and his cohorts went to quench their thirst from the water of the Chavdar tank of Mahad on March 20, 1927 (Omvedt, 2017). This was done to reinforce the Bole Resolution of 1923. Apart from this Anti-Khote movement was also an important part of his activism. In another related landmark event, Dr. Ambedkar publicly burned the Manusmriti. He also launched the newspaper Bahiskrit Bharat, where the term 'Dalit' began to gain traction against the term 'Harijan' introduced by Mahatma Gandhi. He reversed traditional norms followed in the society and re-established new norms for the upliftment of marginalised peoples. This makes him truly a social reformer, or we can even call him a "traditional reformer". The term "traditional reformer" herein signifies his efforts to alter the hegemonic traditions perpetuated by the upper castes on the lower castes through the application of ancient customs and social norms/mores.

Later in his life, Dr. Ambedkar, with numerous supporters, converted to Buddhism after scrupulously studying the religion. Dr. Ambedkar re-affirmed the tenets of Buddhism in the language of social justice. This was widely referred to popularly as the Dalit Buddhist movement, Navayana, or Neo-Buddhism (Zelliot, 2013). In 1954, at the Jagatik Buddhism Council in Kathmandu (Nepal), Dr. Ambedkar was conferred the title of Bodhisattva. In 1955, he instituted the Bhartiya Buddha Mahasabha and, in 1956, finished his concluding work, i.e., "The Buddha and His Dhamma (1957)". Dr. Ambedkar lastly observed to the Sangharakshita, the head of the Western Buddhist Order that "there is still so much to be done.....so much to be done" (Sangharakshita, 1986).

Constitutional provisions brought in by Dr. Ambedkar

Some of the significant provisions brought forward by Dr. Ambedkar in the Indian constitutional values are as follows:

(i) He promoted the federal nature of the state. In this context, he said that he modeled the centre to be strong not only to "save minorities from the misrule of the majority" but also "for it is only the centre which can work for a common end and for the general interests of the country as a whole" (Ambedkar, 1979).

- (ii) Providing special safeguards to the minorities and certain classes who are socially and educationally backward;
- (iii) Incorporating the principle of one man, one value, and one man, one vote through adult suffrage, i.e., voting;
- (iv) Integrating exceptions and qualifications to the Fundamental Rights (Part-III) while advocating measures such as preventive detention (Article-22) and powers of the president of India (Article-53);
- (v) Abolishing untouchability (Article-17) and forced labour (Article-23), which would secure the equal fortification of laws for every citizen as also independence of profession and equality of opportunity; and
- (vi) Incorporating the right to constitutional remedies (Article-32) for making the right tangible. As per Ambedkar, this article was the "heart and soul of the Indian constitution"(Ambedkar, 1979).

Relevance of Ambedkar in Present Times

- **Continuing Inequalities in India:**The 2020 Oxfam inequality index positioned India at rank 151 in terms of workers' rights and 129 out of 158 countries(Nath, 2021). However, this index has not taken into consideration the four new labour codes in India, which were framed keeping in mind the views of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.
- **Continuing Caste-Based Disparities:** Dalits have attained a political identity by positive confirmatory actions of the nation-state such as reservation or forming their own political parties, and so on. But they are still trailing behind in various social scopes (health and education) and economic scopes (income and assets).
- **Faltering legislations:** Legislations such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act were put in place. But as per the NCRB data crime rates are still all-time high. There was a serious deficit in proper implementation at the grass-root levels which made such legislation like a toothless tiger.
- **Pro-People Strategies:**Babasaheb's intellect and endowment are echoed in the pro-people, pro-poor welfare policies and programmes of the Republic of India. In such cases, schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employee Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Bank, Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Yojana (PM-POSHAN), Stand-Up India are aiding the SC and ST community. All of these are the government's steadfast pledge to realise the dreams of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar(Meghwal, 2020).

Conclusion

All of the eight-fold roles played by Babasaheb greatly aided in the process of Nation Building and brought us to the juncture of India 2.0 which is fuelled by the spirit of Atmanirbharta. His role in the national integration plan was undoubtedly to consolidate Indian society which was alienated into castes, languages and so on. A moral pragmatist at heart and soul with the will to galvanise Indians, Dr. Ambedkar spent his lifetime towards the upliftment of the poorest of the poor and reforming our populace's mindset. This can be emancipated to be partially successful due to the growing base of marginalised individuals realising their status and uplifting themselves from such dire straits. Nonetheless, in the current context, India faces numerous socio-economic issues such as caste-based discrimination, intolerance against other religions, secessionism, gender disparity, etc. This is fuelled by multiple stakeholders participating in fear-mongering politics. To counter such anti-thesis, we need to

realisepragmatically Babasaheb's true intellectual soulinside us so that we overhaul our minds from thesocial conflicts that we face now.

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