



AMBEDKAR'S PHILOSOPHY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

HARI BABU MUPPALLA

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad. Telangana

ABSTRACT

Ambedkar has been a very influencing personality in emergence of modern India. Ambedkar's philosophy brought to the fore the denial, deprivation and subjugation of depressed classes and making them untouchables. Ambedkar believed in the concept that an ounce of practice is better than pound of theory. He believed in not mere philosophical expositions but translation of these into the practical social life with the aim of transformation of society. This paper brings out how Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy evolved in the historical context and deeply embedded in and encompasses humanistic philosophy.

Key Words

Ambedkar's Philosophy, Oppression, Discrimination, Depressed Classes, Abolish, Rationality



Introduction

Philosophy is a systematic and rational enquiry about the ultimate realities in the universe. In modern India Ambedkar's philosophy is playing a very important role for egalitarian society. In view of this I will explore how his philosophy evolved over certain period of time. As Marx pointed out, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; but the point is to change it". The whole philosophy of Ambedkar reveals that reconstruction of the society has based on equality which Marx enunciated.

The philosophy of Ambedkar, 'Hero of Modern India' and 'a famous symbol of protest against all forms of social oppression', have had a profound influence on the thinking and actions of the toiling and moiling depressed classes as also on public policy, governmental interventions in social structure and devastating effect on the status quo protagonism in this vast nation, India. His philosophical legacy has resulted in critical analysis and rational explanation of the causal effects of social structure on social processing and advent of the thinking and action based on equality and thus stands out for its outstanding consequences in the contrast with the established and prevailing philosophers in India as well as the west.

Evolution of Ambedkar's thought

Under the leadership of stalwarts like Jyotiba Phule, and late Ambedkar, people belonging to the Depressed Classes started asking questions and seeking amelioration of their socio-economic and cultural conditions and have been findings inspiration and motivated



from Ambedkar writings and speeches. Thus Ambedkar's philosophy is the basis for struggle for equality and social justice.

Ambedkar was a scholar, economist, legal luminary, social activist, a political leader and, above all, a prolific writer and a powerful orator. He was a multi-faceted personality with his intellectual and scholastic prowess being result of intelligence, sheer hard work and keenness to analyse in a rational and sound way.

Ambedkar's social philosophy has been evolved from the observation and critical analysis of contemporary social situations and practices but has the element of universality and it is based on impeccable logic and incontrovertible facts. The evolution of Ambedkar's moral philosophy is characterised by three stages - orthodox stage, the stage of exploring alternatives and the stage of his conversion to Buddhism.

Ambedkar's own words and concepts

Ambedkar contemplated on plight of his own community, Mahars, who were treated as untouchables. Due to the deprivation of the means of livelihood by the Hindus, they had joined the British army in great numbers and won many battles for the British with their discipline, valour, heroic fortitude and utmost devotion. However the British considered them as non military community. Ambedkar deprecated this and called upon Mahars "to fight against this policy and compel the government to remove their ban on their military career"¹. This clearly shows that Ambedkar's rational fight was against the unjust system, which denies the equitable position to members of its society.



In the presidential address at the second session of Ratnagiri district Bahishkrit Parishad, Ambedkar exhorted untouchables to eliminate their slavery themselves. “Untouchables must abolish their slavery themselves. It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self respect. Self respect is a most vital factor in life, and without it, a man is a cipher”². Ambedkar considered that it was most shameful to live a life without self-respect, or love for the country.

In the public meeting at the open ground of BDD Chawls, Worli on 28th September 1932, Ambedkar made it clear that there was no need for temples or wells or inter caste dinners, but they needed government service, food, clothing, education and other opportunities for the Depressed Classes. He was now convinced that political reform should precede social reform³.

Ambedkar has given clarity and vision to the depressed classes in the background of the demand for temple entry to the depressed classes. He clearly opined that the object of temple entry movement was good but the depressed classes should make every effort more for material good than for spiritual good. He clearly declared that they could not get food, clothes, opportunity of educating their children and medical help without money and they should, therefore, struggle to get political power and material gains for progress in life⁴. The determination of Ambedkar on political power and material gains is relevant to the realistic aspects of life of depressed classes, and is in keeping with Ambedkar’s belief that one ounce of practice is better than a pound of theory. Ambedkar attributed lack of progress of the country



to lack of significance to the material prosperity and lack of willingness to obtain knowledge to get material prosperity.

Ambedkar's point is that for any advancement of individual's life is the only education. According to Nelson Mandela, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'. Thus education is the means to achieve material prosperity of an individual life and that leads to sound nation building.

Ambedkar call to the depressed classes to get a hold progress and political power. "If they are indifferent and do not look up, their worries will have no end" ⁵. Ambedkar was firm on the need for economic improvement of the depressed classes for their betterment in life. He dispelled the notion and the foolish belief that the poverty of the depressed classes was predetermined. The thought that your poverty is an inevitability and is inborn and inseparable is entirely erroneous. So he advocated to "abandon this line of thought of considering yourselves to be slaves" ⁶. Hence, Ambedkar gave importance to the economic betterment of the depressed classes by advocating employment and political power for them.

Ambedkar always fought against hero worship, deification and neglect of duty. He showed antipathy towards the superlatives on his work, and qualities in the address of the speakers in the meeting. According to him some of the factors responsible for degradation of our country and ruing of Hindu society were deification, hero worship and neglect of duty. He also deprecated the tendency of people to repose faith for safety and salvation in one individual. Hindus expected



appearance of God in the wake of national calamity and therefore they would await the arrival of manifestation to save them, instead of taking united action against an emergency. He was of the firm opinion that people should abolish their slavery themselves and should not look to God and scriptures for this purpose. He also brought out the futility of fasts and penances in saving the depressed classes from their plight. He believed that it was the duty of the legislature to provide for the food, shelter, education, medicine and all employment opportunities for the depressed classes. He also sought out that the depressed classes should be fully involved in law making. He well thought-out law as abode of all worldly happiness. He exhorted the depressed classes to be vigilant, strong, well educated and self-respecting so as to achieve success. Thus, Ambedkar had identified adherence to blind and irrational beliefs as main cause for the plight of depressed classes and counseled them for education, awareness and self respect as the corner stone of success. This way, Ambedkar clearly deprecated the tendency to deify individuals, look to God for saving people and emphasised on the need of the depressed classes to attain their due rights through the need of law and constitution. This shows higher thinking, based on contemporary concepts of civil society and legal means to achieve ends, and also envisages self development of an individual and realisation of full potential.

Ambedkar has stated on verification that the two personalities that captivated him were the Buddha and Christ. He was in favour of a religion which educated people how they should behave with one another and laid down the duties of humans towards others and their relation with God in the light of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”⁷.



Ambedkar was a firm believer in democracy. For him democracy was a model to be practiced in all state of affairs and in all claims. However, he considered that democracy was most inappropriate for the conditions prevailing in India at that time and he considered that even though democracy was present in India, it ceased to exercise its intelligence, and bound itself to one organisation only. He considered Indians as traditional men who had more faith than wit. “Democracy must learn that its safety lies in having more than one opinion regarding the solution of any particular problem and in order that people may be ready to advice with their opinions, democracy must learn to give a respectful hearing to all those who are worth listening to”⁸.

Ambedkar acknowledged in January 1939 that “This voluntary corpse was born in the struggle started for the assertion of human rights by the Depressed Classes which culminated in the Mahad Satyagraha. For proper discharge of the duty, you have to be men of sterling character whom the rest of society will look to as models of humanity”⁹.

Ambedkar was entirely conscious of the long struggle ahead in ‘the battle for the reclaiming human personality’. He wanted for the depressed classes an assurance of strength, unity and determination to stand for their rights, fight for their rights and never to relent until they win their rights. He regarded as that justice was on their side and hence they should not lose their battle. He considered that the battle was full of joy and was fully spiritual. “There is nothing material in it. For ours is a battle, not for wealth or power, it is a battle for freedom. It is a battle



for the reclamation of human personality which has been suppressed and mutilated by Hindu social system and will continue to be suppressed and mutilated, if in the political struggle the Hindus win and we will lose. My final word of advice to you is to educate, agitate and organise, have faith in yourselves and not lose hope”¹⁰.

Ambedkar evaluated the origin and social, economic, and moral effects of caste system in India and expressed that caste system must end. “We want equality in Hindu religion”. He undoubtedly declared that the Chaturvarna system must be totally eradicated, and the notion that only the higher classes are entitled to privileges (and the lower classes have necessarily to remain in poverty) must end. He wanted the depressed classes to study the situation around them. He considered that what the depressed classes were losing, others were gaining. He clearly analysed and brought out that the want, privations and the humiliations suffered by the depressed classes were not pre ordained due to sins in previous birth but were the outcome of oppressive tyranny perpetrated by the upper classes. Depressed classes did not have lands because others had usurped them and they did not have posts because others had deprived them of the same. “Do not believe in fate but believe in strength,” Ambedkar told the depressed classes. The declaration for equal rights marks a distinctive phase in the evolution of philosophy of Ambedkar, for seeking equality.

Conclusion

Ambedkar’s philosophy is of great importance in view of the fact that it has been the pole star for millions of members of depressed classes in India and had let them to realize their own rights and for



betterment of their own lives. Ambedkar's philosophy evolved over a period of time and due to constant contemplation of the plight of depressed classes in India in the context of scholastic studies of Ambedkar. The philosophy definitely has been conscious of the need for practical relevance and application of philosophical propositions and emphasizes the need for education of depressed classes and also political consciousness among these classes. Philosophy also emphasizes on the need for democracy and also for religion in proper perspective. It deprecates the evils of caste system and superstitions and emphasizes on morality, rationality, equal rights and emancipation of individual members of society in modern and rational perspective.

Footnotes:

1. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay-1954, p, 69.
2. Jeanette Robbin, *Dr. Ambedkar and his Movement*, Dr. Ambedkar Publication Society, Bombay-1964, p, 99.
3. Mahendra Prasad Singh, Himanshu Roy, (Ed), *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*, Pearson Education in South Asia, New Delhi- 2011, p, 163.
4. B, E, Brown, *New Directions in Comparative Politics*, p, 77.
5. Jatava, D. R. *Social Philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p, 17.
6. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay-1954, p, 219.



7. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay-1962, p, 299.
8. *BAWS*, Vol. 17, Part-III, p, 169.
9. Address at the annual period of the Indian Labour Party at Kamgar Maidan on 8th January 1939.
10. *BAWS*, Vol. 17, Part-III, p, 276.

References

- Ambedkar, B. R, (1989): *Writings and Speeches*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay.
- Bakshi, S. R, (2009): *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Socio-Economic and Political Ideology*, Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
- B. E. Brown, (1962): *New Directions in Comparative Politics*, London.
- Dhananjay Keer, (1954): *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
- Jatava, D. R, (1990): *Social Philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi.
- Jondhale, Surendra and Beltz, Johannes, (Ed), (2004): *Reconstructing the World: Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, Oxford University Press, India.
- Mahendra Prasad Singh, Himanshu Roy, (Ed), (2011): *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*, Pearson Education in South Asia, New Delhi.



- Mathew, Thomas, (1991) *Ambedkar Reforms and Revolution*, Segment Books, New Delhi.
- Nim, Hoti Lal, (Ed.), (1969): *Thoughts of Ambedkar*, Siddharth Educations and Cultural Society, Agra.
- Padma Rao, Katti, (2006): *Ambedkar Philosophy*, Lokayatha Publishers, Andhra Pradesh.
- Valerian, Rodrigues, (2008): *The Essential Writings of Ambedkar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.