

Dr. Ambedkar's Contribution: An Epistemological Interrogation of Contemporary Indian Society

Dr. Bhupendra N. Kesur

Head & Associate Professor,
P. G. Department of English,
M.J. College, Jalgaon.

bnkesur@gmail.com

Kshama S. Fegade

Research Student, Jalgaon.

kshama_wl@yahoo.com

Abstract

Untouchables of the Indian subcontinent were led to deliverance by none other than Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. With one of the most enlightened minds of our time, an outspoken personality with a sense of duty, strong values and principles, Dr. Ambedkar today, endures to be one of the most prominent figures of modern India. The world witnessed the rise of Dr. Ambedkar as a beacon of light who rocked the nation to its core, a nation drowning in its own fabricated darkness of ignorance and self destruction. The messiah of the suppressed, the oppressed, the exploited, mistreated, subjugated class of men and women, he dedicated his life for their emancipation. Having achieved so much in life, he always remained a person down to earth and focused on his aim, strong as the sheer truth, never indulging or losing sight of his goals. The present paper is an attempt to study how Dr. Ambedkar's contribution occurs as an epistemological interrogation of contemporary Indian Society. It also speaks about the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar in social reformation of India mainly in the field of education, economics, status of women and politics.

Key words: Caste, class, epistemology, oppression, society, suppression, untouchables.

1. Introduction

1.1. Epistemology

The word epistemology originates from the greek word *episteme* meaning knowledge. Epistemology simply means the theory of knowledge considering its methods, validity, scope and distinction between belief and opinion. Epistemology has philosophical origins and can be divided into individual and social. Richard Kitchener defines individual epistemology as, "Individuals are said to have a personal epistemology (PE), a theory of knowledge that they themselves construct over time" (79). While Martin Kusch defines social epistemology as, "... the expression covers all systematic reflection on the social dimension or nature of cognitive achievements such as knowledge, true belief, justified belief, understanding, or wisdom" (873). Because Fuller's and Goldman's social epistemologies differ from each other in many respects, it is difficult to compare the two. The goal of Fuller's social epistemology is to democratize cognitive authority in terms of

science policy and install a constitution of science. The goal of Goldman's social epistemology is to evaluate social practices in terms of whether they promote or impede epistemically valuable states, such as knowledge.

1.2. Contemporary Indian Society

Thus, epistemology creates a huge impact in the culturally rich, traditional and conservative society in a developing country like India. Indians are extremely proud of their culture and heritage and blindly follow their religious beliefs, even some which can be harmful, because it's a part of their culture and values. This creates problems for a democratic country like India because sometimes it violates the crux of democratic values. As on one side India is making its mark as an economic power and Indians are emerging as the most sought after work force in global markets, on the other side Satish Deshpande sums up in his book *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, the three key trends that have shaped Indian society in the last generation : the rise of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalist ideology, the uneven impact of globalization, and the simultaneous invisibility and prominence of caste issues in politics and everyday life. Ambedkar has faced, tackled and predicted all three of these issues 80 years ago. Studying these issues from the point of view of epistemology can help to create awareness and bring about a change in the mindset of the youth.

1.3. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Personality

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, also affectionately known as Babasaheb, is one of the most multi-faceted figures of our nation. His personality was a harmonious balance of wisdom, character and compassion, which sets him apart from his contemporaries. His compassion towards his fellow 'untouchable' brothers and sisters, gave him the strength to fight, not only for the Dalits, but for all of the toiling masses and downtrodden sections of the society. His compassion also led him on the path of Buddhism, and renunciation of Hinduism, which was prejudiced with contempt for his caste. His wisdom knew no bounds. His wisdom, reflected in his excellent education, was extraordinary and uncontested in his time, and even in the present day. With the establishment of 'Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha' he took the first logical steps towards extrication of the 'Untouchables', by promoting education among them. Further on he led his people along with all the others to a more tolerant society. His skills as an able leader stemmed from his wisdom which he freely shared with all. He tried hard to cultivate and promote it among the populace. His character was exemplary. He always walked with his head held high, his character always intact even when others booed him down. Abraham Lincoln said, "Character is like a tree and reputation its shadow" (43). Reputation is one's projected image for others to see, while character is the true persona that one displays even when no one is watching. Ambedkar strived hard for the rights of Dalits, not for fame or status, but because he had the burning desire to do the right thing, whether anyone else cared about it or not. He was educated enough to live a comfortable life, but he chose to live the life of hardships and sacrifices, for his people. His character was the magnet that attracted the people to him and had the power to command respect, love and devotion of people.

Not confined to any specific liberal thought or specific country in the west, he always kept away from radicals and polarised dogmas. He himself criticised the theories or ideas of thinkers whom he followed, if he did not agree with their views. His writing style is very much lucid, unwavering with clarity of thoughts, methodical, precise in data, details and references. It shows

his deep study and thorough knowledge of various fields in the East and the West, and analytical and empirical mind. Along with all the above, he was a successful, linguist, jurist, economist, anthropologist and a historian. His clothes were his resistance. Being a Dalit, he was prohibited from wearing good clothes. He wore suits. He was always clean shaven and wore clothes that were western and superior in taste.

1.3.1. Early Life of Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar lived by the maxim, "Life should be great rather than long". The path that led Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to the zenith of his great life was a rocky road full of hardships and challenges. Born on 14th April 1891, into the 'Mahar' caste of Hindu Dalits, he was the last of the fourteen children of Ramji Maloji Sakpal, an army officer in British India. From a very tender age he experienced the stigma of untouchability. He was born into poverty, in a downtrodden family, with no educational background. His mother passed away when he was young and only his two brothers and two sisters survived. He was the only one to complete his school education. Later, as he grew into an adult, he wrote about his experiences on untouchability in a heart wrenching autobiographical account titled 'Waiting for a Visa'. His family was his rock that supported him through all the storms. As a humble and proud son of a loving and devoted father, he credited his father for his success and education. His father motivated him towards pursuing his educational goals and taught him self-discipline. He advised his wife, Ramabai to instil the same values in their only son, Yashwant too. 'Behind every successful man, is a woman' goes the adage; likewise, Ramabai was the pillar that supported and Babasaheb's dreams. She stood by Babasaheb's side through the long and difficult ordeal, supporting him, taking care of their family, sharing his family responsibilities to the best of her abilities. Along with him, his family too was far from materialistic comforts, and was subjected to suffering insults, harassment and contempt. He advised his simple family that materialism was a mirage which entrapped man, making him lose his sights from an ideal life. However, he never lost his self-esteem in adult life. Whenever faced humiliation, he would rise to the occasion with his modest, yet rebellious character, instead of accepting the situation mutely or complacently. He was a thinker with a skeptical mind from his early days.

1.3.2. Ambedkar's Literary and Judicial Expertise

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a strong advocate of human rights. He was extremely democratic in his professional as well as personal life. Despite his high and prestigious education and knowledge, at the same time, he was never too proud to be a good listener. His deep study on various subjects and experiences in foreign lands brought humility to him and he was even open to accept criticism along with any mistakes. His works were a product of such deep research and understanding, that there has hardly been anyone who could point out any errors in his works. He gave equal voice to his colleagues at work as well as his wife and family at home. His western education had deeply influenced him, and made him believe in the ideals of 'liberty', 'equality' and 'fraternity'. He had a scientific temperament rooted in rationality and modernity. He claimed himself to be 'a man of reasoning'. His logical and analytical abilities of keen observation are recognised in his writings, his public works as a leader, as the first law minister of India, and as the architect of the constitution of our country. He was and is still considered one of the best spokespersons and authors of India. One of the best linguists with excellent command over

languages like English, Marathi, Hindi and Sanskrit, books authored by him, his writings and speeches are today considered some of the best in modern literature, and are even studied, cited and celebrated internationally. He showcased his leadership skills not only in his fight against casteism but also in the national freedom struggle and the drafting of the constitution of our country. Our constitution is the longest constitutions of any sovereign country in the world.

1.3.3. Ambedkar's Education and his views on Education

Though he studied and was inspired by many schools of thought and thinkers, he attributed to have only three gurus whom he idolised. They were, Gautam Buddha, Sant Kabir and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. In his early days of youth, he was inspired by Gandhian thoughts. Under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership, the Mahad Satyagraha by the Dalits (1927) for the right to drink water took place, followed by temple Satyagraha of Nasik (1930) for the Dalit community to enter the place of worship and freely pray to their God. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's spirit of breaking away from the inconsistent, pointless and unreasonable was so solid that with his positive and creative energy he was able to actualise an 'alternative culture', one that was more consistent with his vision of an ideal society and social environment. He was stirred by the thoughts of Pandit Jyothee Thass, a Dalit leader and forerunner of Dr. Ambedkar, on Dalits and Buddhism. Pandit Jyothee Thass provided the inspiration for Ambedkar's book *Buddha and His Dhamma*. He established a new set of 'Navyaan' Buddhism. Ambedkar envisioned a new way of life for his Dalit followers, through Navyaan Buddhism, preaching 'Dhamma', an ideal path of living life according to modern value system. He boldly claimed, "I was born Hindu, but I will not die one". Till the end of his days, he strived to change the social conditions around him, to make them less inhuman and more favourable and accepting. "So long as you do not have social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you", were his words to the Untouchables of India (Ambedkar *Path to Salvation*).

In this struggle for emancipation of Dalits, the most powerful weapon and the trustiest aide on the side of Dr. Ambedkar, was his education. Dr. Ambedkar was gravely influenced by his teachers. While in school, his teacher, who was a Brahmin, was fond of him, and changed his name from 'Ambavadekar', and gave him his own name, 'Ambedkar'. This showed the deep love and respect he had for his teacher which transcended caste discrimination and also sheds light on his fight which was against caste hierarchy and not against the Brahmins, as is sometimes misunderstood. Bright in his studies right from his school days, his resolve to study and gain knowledge was commendable. Overcoming numerous obstacles, he was the first untouchable to clear his matriculation exam in 1907, thus becoming a role model to all of the untouchable youth to follow. He studied further at Columbia University on scholarship for 3 years. Later he went to London to complete his Bar course. Even during his studies in the West, the exceptional Dr. Ambedkar completed his courses in a really short time span, ahead of the time allotted to the scheduled courses. While there he forged a steady bond of friendship with his Mentor at Columbia University, John Dewey. Ambedkar was gravely influenced by his thoughts on pragmatist ideology. Edwin Seligman, James Shotwell and James Harvey impressed Ambedkar with their liberal school of thought. From ancient Greek thinkers like Thucydides to Bertrand Russell, Ambedkar was exposed to au courant thinking in the West.

Having himself studied a plethora of subjects from a variety of fields exhaustively, he realised that education was the key to make society stable. Dr Ambedkar was not a professional educationist and he never made any theoretical analysis of teaching methodologies. However, despite this, he put forth excellent ideas on education. He believed that good behaviour and good conduct arise from logical reasoning and that can only be acquired through quality education, practical experience, and scholarly discussions and dialogue. He believed that the objectives of education are meaningful that aid in making humans happy and prosperous and helping society progress. He was a strong proponent of logical and scientific education. He was also in favour of making education relevant to employment. He was against an external agency deciding the curricula of a university. He felt that the curricula should be designed democratically by the teachers who are in the field, keeping with the requirements of the subjects and expectations of the students. He emphasised complete and compulsory education. He prioritised technical education and advocated scholarships for the weaker section and higher education in general. Although he was strongly influenced by western thought, was a strong advocate of teaching children in their native regional languages. He also insisted that education must be secular and uniform to all irrespective of caste, race or sex. He favoured use of scientific ideology starting with primary education and laid special emphasis on inculcating healthy habits from early childhood for maintaining good hygiene and regular physical education. As a pragmatic individual, he believed that research and teaching should go hand in hand and also advocated autonomy of universities in admissions, teaching, examinations, and appointments in order to protect its sanctity from the bane of bureaucratic shortcomings. A man so visionary and meticulous in planning Dr. Ambedkar even proposed administrative structure of an ideal university in detail. He also defined the qualities that an ideal teacher should embody like good oratory skills, experienced, well read and knowledgeable, a philosopher and a guide to the students. All his statues today depict him with a book in one hand, inspiring everyone to take up education

2. Discussion

2.1. Dr. Ambedkar's Contribution in Social Reformation of India

In the 1940s, Ambedkar corresponded with W. E. B. Dubois, the prominent African American intellectual activist, who was also fighting for the cause of emancipation of Negroes of America. Ambedkar expressed his interest in Dubois' work as Ambedkar had also been "a student of the Negro problem" (*Letter*). He also asked Dubois for guidance as the problem of Untouchables in India shared similarity with the situation of Negroes of America. Thus, here the foundations of all his future decisions were laid. The Indian society in the late 19th century was dominated by the Hindu religion which was based on the Varna system. Religion is hardly ever based on evidentialism and hence, the conditions and rules at the start of the religious movement change over time. People of authority in a religion eventually seize power bringing with them a new set of rules and conditions which once formed, cannot be challenged as its episteme does not exist, it's based on belief for justification rather than rationality.

The Indian society with its deep rooted dogmas was beyond repair requiring a revolt and complete reformation to set it right. Ambedkar had suffered injustice and humiliation for being born, a low caste, despite of being immensely talented and meritorious. Based on his first hand experience of caste discrimination and his thorough study of religion and knowledge of

humanities, he undertook the herculean task of reforming the society. He wanted to reorganise Indian society, not on the basis of religion but on the basis of principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, thus reorganising the birth-based society with a value based one. In order to overcome untouchability, he encouraged people to break from their caste based mindset, with various previously forbidden activities from participating in inter-caste dinners, to arranging inter-caste marriages with approval of the nuptials. He himself participated in such feasts and marriages. Reservations proved to be the most successful instrument in counter acting with caste prejudices and ensured representation of Dalits in institutions of higher education. Ambedkar encouraged the Dalits to organise and agitate against any social wrongs. Ambedkar was criticised for putting the cause of his social reformation before the freedom of the country from British. In his essay, "Annihilation of Caste", Ambedkar justified with many examples that for a political revolution to occur, a social reformation is necessary. He explained that before the Arab became a powerful political power, they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by Prophet Mohammed, even the political revolution of Shivaji was possible only because of the social reformation activities undertaken by the saints in Maharashtra, who preceded him. Thus, Ambedkar claimed with illustrations, that, "Emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for political expansion of the people" (*Social Reform*). And thus his activities were in fact, patriotic in nature as he was creating the preconditions of a successful political revolution for India. He categorically stated while addressing the constituent assembly (November 25, 1949), "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy' which means, a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life" (*Speech*).

Eventually, Ambedkar, after a lifelong battle against caste discrimination and fight for his rights, disappointed by the injustice meted out at his people by Hinduism, and seeing no respect for his people in Hinduism, urged his untouchable brethren to leave the Hindu fold and embrace Buddhism.

2.1.1. Education and Economics

Subjectivist epistemology states that knowledge is socially and historically constructed. Indian society with its deep rooted Varna system can be a prime example of this. All knowledge was strictly restricted only to the Brahmin caste. While Kshatriyas and Vaishyas had limited access to it and that too only through the Brahmins, the Dalits were absolutely forbidden of any access to any kind of knowledge. Brahmins were able to legitimise themselves as the superior among the other Varnas through epistemic violence and repression and were easily able to manipulate a social hierarchy system based on birth and caste to their advantage giving them power over all the other 3 Varnas and left the Dalits with the biggest disadvantage. After many centuries, only after colonisation, when an external agency allowed education and western thought and culture to Indians, were the Dalits able to access education and knowledge and develop skepticism that challenged the established epistemology that had ruled their society for millennia. Ambedkar was a product of this, a disadvantaged Dalit Indian educated in western thought. His struggle for liberalisation of Dalits started there and eventually culminated to the freedom struggle of the entire nation for freedom from their western colonisers and oppressors.

Anticipating the problem of education of Dalits, Ambedkar constituted the Depressed Classes Education Society in 1928, which established a number of colleges, hostels, libraries and

reading centres. He also founded the Hitkarini Sabha in 1928, which opened hostels in Sholapur (Solapur) and Belgaun (Belgaum) along with free reading centres, hockey club and two hostels in Bombay (Mumbai). In 1945, he founded Lok Shaikshanik Samaj, to ensure that the Backward classes received higher education. Lok Shaikshanik Samaj played an important role in facilitating higher education for the Dalits by opening number of colleges, middle schools as well as extended financial assistance to hostels.

He realised that not only creating awareness among his people about school education is a problem, but also keeping the students in school and reducing the number of dropouts was a challenge in itself. In order to deal with this problem, urged the education minister of the then newly independent India to spend more on primary education. As discussed earlier, he was a strong advocate of technical education, but he had realised that technical education being expensive was out of reach of Dalits. He himself had gone through the same hardships and faced the same problems that many young Dalits faced while pursuing education. Ambedkar suggested many solutions to this problem like apprenticeship for scheduled caste boys in Railways or government printing press for vocational training, scholarships for Dalit students to study abroad in international universities and educational loans for students studying in science and technological fields. For improving the future of the Dalits, Ambedkar suggested that SC boys can be kept as apprentices in such industrial units as the Railway workshops or government printing press.

Epistemic injustice followed colonisation in India. According to British economist Angus Maddison, India's share of the world economy deteriorated from 24.4% in 1700s to 4.2% in 1950. Industrialisation in India was reduced severely and India had gone from a major producer and exporter of manufactured goods to a major consumer and importer of western goods made with raw materials produced in India. There was no urbanization (656).

Ambedkar had seen the first hand impact of rapid industrialisation of the West and wanted to bring the same to India. He resounded the need for cheap and abundant electricity in our country, in order to pave way for industrialisation. "Damodar Valley Project" - the first multipurpose river valley project in India in 1944 was based on the lines of Tennessee Valley Authority under Dr. Ambedkar's directions. As an activist, Ambedkar was not new to controversy or criticism. "Ambedkar has often been criticised for his modernisation of vision, which it is argued, drew heavily upon West for inspiration", says D. R. Nagraj (56-57). As an economist, he had thoroughly studied the Indian Rupee for his D.Sc. thesis at London, and to counteract the situation, in the newly independent India with poor economy, he was instrumental in conceptualizing the Reserve Bank of India. Dr. Ambedkar though influenced by many ideologies and thinkers, was never a blind follower but a liberal thinker himself.

2.1.2. Status of Women

Feminist epistemology is a part of social epistemology. Elizabeth Anderson characterizes feminist epistemology as properly belonging within social epistemology, describing it as "the branch of social epistemology that investigates the influence of *socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences* on the production of knowledge" (54). Feminist epistemologists try to understand the role of gender and social relations in creating and shaping the knowledge that propagates in society. Indian women in the colonial

times were ignorant of feminist concerns or sensibilities. The extent of epistemic violence on women was such that they had no individuality or sense of self identity. They accepted the treatment given to them by the society and lived their lives according to rules and customs set by the patriarchal system. They were even unaware of the injustice meted out to them on every level. The social episteme of women trapped them in the collective knowledge and conceptions of objectivity and subjugation across all castes and classes throughout the subcontinent. Women needed more aid in improving their conditions than any other group of people in India.

Upon returning to India, when Ambedkar joined as a Labour Member of the Viceroy's executive council, he enacted many laws for women, including maternity leaves and equal pay irrespective of the sex of the worker. His contribution in women's struggle and the selfless service from voicing their opinions to bestowing upon them their fundamental rights is unparalleled. "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which its women have achieved", were the words of Babasaheb, projecting a concept of feminist ideals far ahead of his time (Demakis 415). At the time of Ambedkar, there were social reformers like the Arya Samaj and the Brahma Samaj. However, they worked only for the betterment of Hindu women in upper caste and namely to put a stop to barbaric practice of Sati. This is where Ambedkar differed hugely from his counterparts, because he fought for the upliftment of every woman in India irrespective of social status, caste, age or religion and even the shamed and shunned devdasis and prostitutes. In his essay, "Annihilation of Caste", Ambedkar claims that the practice of Sati was started to preserve purity of upper castes. It was never a common practice in Dalits, yet he fought for its abolition, thus showing he had raised over petty caste politics to a greater cause of women's emancipation.

A women's association, working for the cause of women's betterment, was founded in January 1928, with Ramabai Bhimrao Ambedkar as its president. As a creature of habit, Dr. Ambedkar extensively studied the position of women and brought to light the denial of her fundamental rights. He stated that the purdah system imposed on Muslim women was to deprive them of moral and mental nourishment. Babasaheb wanted to liberate all women of all He started involving women in his struggle for social reformation to eradicate caste system. A large crowd of women had gathered at Nagpur on 20th July, 1942, at a women's conference in order to show their support for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar where he addressed them and asked them to take a stand against inhumane customs, regressive rituals and superstitions, traditionalism, and take up education and free thought. "Never wear such clothes which will degrade our personality and character. Avoid wearing the jewellery on your body everywhere. It is not fair to make hole on nose and wear nath" (Bakshi). In this he condemned all the bad traditions, habits and ways of life which made life difficult and complex for women. The most overwhelming support he received was from illiterate women who followed his advice with most sincerity. In his struggle for social reformation, Ambedkar, did some work to create awareness among the prostitutes in brothels of Kamathipura. The power of Ambedkar's persuasion is witnessed in the story of transformation of David, a pimp at Kamathipura, who inspired by Ambedkar's words, underwent a change of heart and closed down the brothel and freed all the women under his claim. He requested all prostitutes to give up their profession and live the life of honour. In 1927, Ambedkar was nominated as a member of Bombay Legislative Council. In this new role, he appealed for the passing of maternity benefit bill for women labourers. He brought to the attention of the Council that women needed rest during pre natal and post natal period and the bill would recognise the dignity of women and will

greatly benefit them as well as the entire nation eventually. He also requested the government to bear the expenses for this provision as it was in their interest, and was hence, their duty.

As the first Law Minister of independent India, he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament, which empowered women further, but resigned, from his post when it was procrastinated and opposed by people with myopic perceptions. It was a feminist bill, which when passed as a law, would give women various rights such as right to own property, rights of inheritance were made equal for sons as well as daughters, adoption rights in women's favour, divorce procedure was simplified, abolition of polygamy, legalisation of inter-caste marriages etc. Hindu Code Bill broke the chains of patriarchy which had left them at the mercy of their male family members. Ambedkar's ideas influenced the enactment of many subsequent pro-women Acts viz. Sati Prevention Act, 1987, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Family Courts Act, 1984, Protection of Human Right Act, 1993, The Maternity Benefit Act 1961, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, The National Commission for Women Act, 1990, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, to cite a few. Ambedkar projected a written constitution for an effective democracy.

2.1.3. Political Reformation

In order to get rid of the social bias, Ambedkar laid the foundation of a new society with a modern constitution for a newly independent India. With the new constitution, Ambedkar created a new political and social episteme for the citizens of India based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar forged the Constitution of India which declares our country to be a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic. He stated that while devising the constitution, the principle aim of the constitution must be to remove the governing class from its position and to prevent it from remaining as a governing class forever. While drafting the Constitution of our country, he promoted 'Universal Adult Franchise', the right to vote for all citizens of India, and indiscrimination on the basis of caste, creed, age, sex or religion. "It has often been asserted with great confidence that the purest parts of philosophy or political in nature, that even a theory of knowledge may be identified with a particular political point of view." (White 77).

Ambedkar's political thought emerged from his radical, scientific and liberal thinking. The central idea of his political thinking is enclosed in two of his statements, "the rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of society", and "a democratic form of government presupposes a democratic form of society" (Ranade VI). Even though he drafted the constitution to the best of his abilities, he did point out the requirement of a moral society, than the written law in governing the people. He invested on social morality for effective working of the democratic form of government. Ambedkar disapproved of Congress and its activities which had its own hegemony on Indian people. He was labelled as a separatist and a pro-British, but that did not deter his resolve of promoting the social equality of backward sections of society before political freedom. Liberation of the nation was worthless if one section of citizens of the country were still living under unfair domination of another section of citizens. He was a patriot in his own right and, unlike Congressmen, did not need to make a show of his patriotic stand. Ambedkar is as much a nationalist as anybody else in Congress. He did not go to prison like other Congressmen, nor did

he go underground like other socialists, because he was a man of reason and learning and could very well work within the system, promoting his stand of social reformation before political reformation.

2.2. Relevance at Present

Ambedkar had thoroughly studied any subject within his reach. He studied the subject analysing it for its creation and its dissemination of knowledge. He always examined the subject with skepticism, rationality and whether it could be justified with truth or belief. Knowledge to him was awareness and understanding of reality. Only after carefully testing the theories presented to him and verifying them, could he approve and propagate them. Thus he embodied the very core values of epistemology and implemented them in real life.

For today's huge youth force of India and impressionable minds, Dr. Ambedkar with his inspiring life, progressive ideology and an exemplary personality, stands as an icon, whom the youth can follow, idolise, imitate and endorse. They can achieve success in their life if they follow the principles laid down by Babasaheb, and can directly contribute to the growth of the nation. Most of the young generation knows Ambedkar as only the great protagonist of reservation of seats in legislature and posts in Government. However, they need to be taught that when Ambedkar accepted Buddhism in his final stage of life, he only wanted liberation and freedom for his followers and advised them to stand independent on their own and live a life of dignity, instead of depending on the support of reservation. His message to the youth was to continue his legacy, to continue and complete his unfinished works and be inspired by him into action rather than hero worshipping him. He insisted that the youth should be self employed, pursue vocational training and be the new age entrepreneurs that our country needs. According to him, the youth should be industrious, productive, innovative and progressive in their fields of interest but he particularly expected Indian youth to progress in the field of science and technology, and on that front, India has delivered and become the global leader in producing scientific and technologically highly educated personnel. The young urban generations are raised in modern times and are oblivious of the caste prejudice and have developed a very tolerant temperament towards all members of society, including support for LGBTQ. They do not want to dwell in the past and be marred by hatred.

2.3. Current Political Situation

In the current political conditions, Ambedkar's ideology and thoughts are growing more and more distant. As vote banks conceived in terms of caste and community are becoming important, Ambedkar's name is evoked by taking undue advantage as he is the symbol of Dalit aspirations. This competitive misappropriation of Ambedkar by all political parties has completely deformed him ideologically, and sapped him of his radical content. He stood against everything that the Hindu nationalists propagate today. However, today, ironically, the biggest devotees of Ambedkar are the politicians, who have made him appear to be upholding their creed. This hegemonic ideology of Hindu nationalists is harmful to the very fabric of democracy as it takes away individual freedom. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have constitutional guarantees, but certain traditions are being imposed on the upper caste youth which they may or may not approve, like no choice in the kind of food they want to eat, or the clothes that they want to wear, or the careers they want to pursue, or whom they choose as their spouse, as there is no

personal liberty. Hence it is not just the Dalits who look up to Ambedkar and follow his ideologies, but even the other privileged and upper caste youth too look up to him as Ambedkar stands for individualism and liberty. Religious extremists are the very anti-thesis of Ambedkar and uphold and propagate the old and obsolete hierarchal system. Our constitution guarantees our freedom but it could not exterminate the monster of caste which still prevails. The day that every individual is free to marry whoever they wish, as long as both the parties approve and it is not harming anyone, Ambedkar will cease to exist and he will no longer be required.

2.4. Present conditions of Dalits

Although it's been over 70 years since independence, caste discrimination still persists in the country. Our society has changed immensely, and it continues to progress towards equality with each new generation, there is also a harsh reality that must be faced where many Dalits still live in abject poverty and no means of education or breaking from the system. All Dalits may not be sanitation workers but sadly all sanitation workers are Dalits. They are not provided even the basic safety gear to tackle the unsanitary sewers and endanger their lives on a daily basis. Women sanitation workers face even worse conditions and work for even smaller wages than their male counterparts. Supreme Court's latest judgement to provide the sanitation workers with basic hygiene and safety gear is a wakeup call for the ignorant citizens. The fact that they had to go to Supreme Court to demand what is their basic requirement to function is heart breaking as working in sewers without proper safety gear is extremely dangerous and poses a health hazard. Nowhere in the world today are people sent to 'gas chambers to die'.

3. Conclusion

Today, because of Dr. Ambedkar's sacrifices, hard work, knowledge and vision, a new structure of society has come into existence. The swift changes which have occurred are evident in our day to day lives. His works have created an epistemological break in the society, which was decomposing under Varna system for thousands of years. His ideas appealed to the masses to question the very discourse of traditional, highly esteemed and often wrongly prided, culture which was regressive and had divided the very fabric of society into thousands of hierarchal groups. His protests and outcry changed the trajectory of social reformation and brought about a singular and progressive revolution.

Today we live in a new India, where India is making progress in all spheres and Indians are travelling all across the globe while spreading their culture and sharing their talent. Among these new globe trotters, Dalits and single women too are crossing borders, aspiring for a successful career, travelling, gaining new experiences in the world where they are valued for their skills. Today Dalits and women are well educated and do not need any leaders to speak for them. Even though they are scattered across the globe, they share a strong sense of bond through social networking and they can organise themselves. They are clear headed today and quick to react or gather community support if they see any atrocities. They always have Ambedkar's writings to guide them.

Unfortunately, today the scene in present India is quite disheartening. In today's polarised political atmosphere, Babasaheb Ambedkar remains one of the most misunderstood, misquoted and misrepresented Indian leader. Many sections of societies with vested interests happen to spread rumours and lies about his works. They use his name for their own selfish, political gains.

However, Dr. Ambedkar has always shown his followers the right path. The only way to eliminate darkness is through the light of education. The need of the hour is for the youth to be more alert and study his writings and works with their own perspectives and interpretations in the modern context. Only on deeper individual inspection, does one develop a new regard, respect and genuine interest in his teachings.

Dr. Ambedkar's heart cried out for, his downtrodden brothers and sisters, who were pinned under an enormous mountain of sorrow, pain and suffering for thousands of years with no hope in sight. The word "Dalit" means "broken". Just like a phoenix, Babasaheb rose from the ashes of the broken system, the broken religion, and the broken nation to become a beacon of hope for his generation and the future generations to follow. Discrimination, humiliation only made him strong as iron bands born of fire. He inspired others in his community, to take education. He showed through example that education alone was power. "Educate, Agitate and Organise" was his message to his people, in order to live a life of dignity, to build a strong community and eventually for the progress of the entire country (Keer 351). For Ambedkar, humanism with its values of equality and liberty were above nationalism. He symbolised new India to the people, where as a modernist social reformer, he freely advocated the western ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity, over the inhumane caste system. A true visionary, many of his accurate predictions and prudent decisions can find positive percussions in the present. The citizens of this nation will forever be indebted of the temperance of this distinguished figure. He has left behind a legacy worthy of inheriting, honouring and celebrating. He has inspired a whole new genre of literature—Dalit literature in every language—through books like Om Prakash Valmiki's 'Joothan', Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchable' and spanned into award winning movies like 'Article 13', 'Fandry' and documentaries like 'Jai Bhim Comrade'. Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winning economist of India hails in an interview given that "Ambedkar is my Father in Economics. He is a true celebrated champion of the underprivileged. He deserves more than what he has achieved today. However he was highly controversial figure in his home country, though it was not the reality. His contribution in the field of economics is marvellous and will be remembered forever..!" (Web). Recently, in a truly proud moment for the country, in November 2010, the then president of US, in his address to the Indian Parliament, Barack Obama recognised the extraordinary contributions to India made by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In conclusion, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is a burning example that showcases the power of resolve of one determined man, coming from an impoverished and downtrodden background, fierce as a famished wolf, taking charge of the reins of a newly independent nation inherited by obscured yet hopeful citizens, and steering them all on the path of education, tolerance and love towards a new dawn.

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