



Dr. Ambedkar As A Social Reformer

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Abstract: B.R. Ambedkar was a leading activist and social reformer who gave his life working for the upliftment of the Dalits and the socially backward class of India. A messiah for the downtrodden, he continuously fought for eradication of caste discrimination that had fragmented the Indian society and made it cripple. Born in a socially backward family, Ambedkar was the victim of caste discrimination, inequality and prejudice. However, fighting all odds, he attained higher education thus becoming the first ever untouchable to attain the same. No sooner after completing his studies, he launched himself politically fighting for the rights of the depressed class and inequality practiced in the society. He was a crusader of social equality and justice. Academically trained as a jurist, he went on to become the first Law Minister of Free India and the framer or chief architect of the Constitution of India. In his later years, he acted as a revivalist of Buddhism in India, by converting himself to the religion to free himself from the perils of caste differences and unfairness practiced by the Hindus.

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Introduction:

Dr. Ambedkar put stock in serene techniques for social change. He was bolstered to sacred lines in the developmental procedure of social change. He thought the components like peace which are crucial for public activity. It additionally endeavors to support establishments that will improve „social order“. He was inverse to the forceful strategy in mutual change for it hindrance the levelheadedness and make bedlam. He had no confidence in disorder strategies. A welfare condition of all can't be created on the grounds of fear, power and severe strategies. As per him vicious technique to a tranquil culture isn't just wrong yet too unreasonable and indecent. He was a genuine Renaissance man, an individual who exceeded expectations in a wide range of regions of request. In spite of the fact that he was loathed by traditional Hindus and marked as a demolisher of Hinduism, students of history currently understand the vital job Dr. Ambedkar played in perceiving Hindu society. A long way from being a backstabber, he assumed a significant job in rejuvenating Hinduism, resuscitating it by testing everything that was unjustifiable and unreasonable inside it. Truth be told, he realized a renaissance of Hinduism by inciting the Hindus to reconsider a portion of the fundamental principles of their religion. Dr. Ambedkar had an extraordinary

confidence in social reformers to make popular supposition for against of the gross disparities in the general public. He encouraged them to establish associations to manage critical instances of segregation. The associations should bargain the incredible segment of society to allow to the persecuted and discouraged classes to work in various parts. The Hindu society should give a space to discouraged areas by utilizing them in their different divisions fit to the limits of candidates. As indicated by him, social change and social equity are in fact basic to the libertarianism that any vote based system must try it. As a social democrat Dr. Ambedkar stressed on an a lot more extensive perspective on unfaltering revamping of nation with complete development and social mix in the Nation without rank separation. As the significant draftsman of the Indian constitution, Dr. Ambedkar developed the shields for building up an increasingly impartial society to a huge number of mistreated and discouraged classes. He was firmly accepted that political establishments were liable for transforming the current social organizations by utilizing authoritative power to yield the outcomes. Political establishments will endure just when they effectively work for social transformation.

The Contribution of Ambedkar The contribution of Ambedkar towards the upliftment and

dignity of the Dalit community is remarkable and phenomenal. The amount of injustice, cruelty, oppression and suppression had given to the Dalits, is simply unbelievable and unforgivable. No one try to wipe out this sheer injustice? Ambedkar was a God gift to the Dalit community. He was the only person, who not only tried to wipe out this caste system, but also did his level best to eliminate the hierarchy based caste system. Ideas of high and low had crept into the Hindu society; Ambedkar suffered because of this; he also fought hard against such differences; later he became the first Law Minister in free India. The credit for making a Law and creating the necessary atmosphere to wipe out 'Untouchability' goes to Ambedkar. The 'Untouchables' are Hindus. Therefore, the doors of temples should open to them. If the Hindus can touch the Christians and the Muslims, why should they not touch the people who are themselves Hindus and who worship the Hindu Gods? This was Ambedkar's argument. He gave a call that people who practice and support 'Untouchability' should be punished. Some people argue that the 'Untouchables' were not yet fit for equality. The Hindus say that they want independence and democracy. How can a people who have temple upon all the liberties of a backward group aspire to democracy? 18 Ambedkar argue like this and thundered that these people had no right to speak of justice and democracy. In 1927 there was a big conference. It resolved that there should be no caste differences in the Hindu Dharma and that people of all castes should be allowed to work as priests in temples. The Chowdar Tank dispute went to the court. The court decided that tanks are public property. The 'Untouchables' who have been subjected to humiliation for hundreds of years should find justice. For this purpose Ambedkar indicated a few clear steps. No section of the Hindus should be kept out of temples. There should be more representatives of the 'Untouchables' in the legislatures. The government should not nominate these representatives. The people should elect them. The government should employ the 'Untouchables' in larger numbers in the army and the police department. Those who suffer in the Hindu society should get justice. This was Ambedkar's rocklike decision. He was prepared to oppose anybody to reach his goal. The British Government invited several Indian leaders to discuss the problems of India. The conferences were held in London; they were called the "Round Table Conference". Gandhiji also took part in them. At the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar spoke angrily against the government. He said that the backward sections did not enjoy equality with other sections, even under the British Government; the British had just followed the

ways of the other Hindus. That was a time when Gandhiji was very popular in India. Millions of people followed his footsteps with devotion. Ambedkar openly opposed Gandhiji's views on how justice should be secured for the 'Untouchables'. He supported the views which seemed right to him. Ambedkar secured for the Harijans (the Untouchables) 'separate electorates' at the Second Round Table Conference in 1931. As a result, the Harijans could elect their representatives separately. But Gandhiji could not agree with Ambedkar.

NARRATIVE VIOLENCE AMONG ANTI-CASTE ACTIVISTS

Ambedkarite activists often tell hagiographic stories about of their patriarch, Dr B.R. Ambedkar. In my experience of meeting and talking with Dalit anti-caste activists there is an unquestioned reverence and respect for the life and work of Dr Ambedkar that can only be compared with a demi-god or modern pop-icton. This reverence is expressed through the telling of stories about Babasaheb's life and work. Like most interactions with Ambedkarites, my own experiences interacting with Dalit diaspora Ambedkarites on the occasion of 125th birth anniversary was no exception to my previous experiences of this phenomenon of hagiographic storytelling. On this jubilant occasion, I spoke to an audience of Ambedkarites at Michigan State University and asked them to fully consider their own agency as speaking social agents. In being invited to give a lecture to Ambedkarite anti-caste activists there is always a balance between gently suggesting pragmatic action and providing critical analysis of the ongoing anti-caste movement. As should be evident by now, I do not think narrative is an inanimate and agentless fact of social interaction. Nor do I think that stories, or narratives, are just subjective expression of personal truths devoid of any social and political relevance for social change. Therefore, my focus in such "lecture" situations is often to draw attention to the stories that I hear activists themselves voice. As a social constructionist, I believe firmly in the power of stories to influence social and structural change and I am intentional about placing the agency for change among the people who have experienced, and in turn, tell (and retell) such stories. I have written elsewhere about the elliptical character of these stories and their ability to mobilize activism. But, beyond movement mobilization what do stories do? How do they work to strengthen identity boundaries and build awareness of unmet rights and self-worth?

STORIES IN AMBEDKARITE ANTI-CASTE CIRCLES

One of many hagiographic stories of Ambedkar's life involves his 1934 trip to Daulatabad Fort in Maharashtra. Travelling with a group of about 30 "untouchable" friends and arriving late and tired to these historical ruins, the party stopped to wash and refresh by a small tank of water that was near the entrance to the fort. Feeling newly refreshed as they entered the front gate of the fort, an old Muslim man came running to the entrance yelling "The Dheds [meaning 'untouchables'] have polluted the tank!" After some tense debate with the local authorities, the party was eventually allowed to see the ruins of the fort, but not without an armed guard to ensure that they did not "touch water anywhere in the fort". Dr Ambedkar's own autobiographical sketch of this episode ends with the evaluative statement: "This will show that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Mohammedan." Such a story is retold with disbelief and frustration by Dalit activists and recreated as street plays in many low-caste communities. But to what actual effect?

While Dr Ambedkar clearly told this story towards the goal of illustrating an evaluative judgment about the dehumanizing demerits of the caste system even outside of the Hindu fold, he also, in telling such a story, must have soon realized how little control he would have over this narrative going forward. Again in the words of Cobb "narrative authorship is partial and dependent" and, therefore, we often "arrive at narratives that we did not make." While such a narrative helps to build a collective identity as marginalized, it also paradoxically positions Dalits in identities that they have little control over. How followers and detractors use this story to make their own evaluative judgments and build support for their own identity concerns represents a crucial question for anti-caste activists pushing for social change. While this story clearly communicates the injustice and inhumanity of the situation Dalits consistently face, it also constructs their identity as distinct from, and possibly in opposition to, Muslims. Such a story, therefore, creates a paradox for Dalit activists. It creates an identity of "other" that supports and reinforces an identity and experience of self as "othered". While it underscores the inhumane and unjust realities of life as a Dalit or Scheduled Caste (SC), it also closes off dialogue with others (in this case Muslims and possibly other "downtrodden" and economically depressed potential allies) by strengthening in-group identity, as well as, portraying Dalits as either victims or a distinct and cohesive community as apart from

various "others" in society. Either of these social positions leaves something to be desired for Dalit activists working for social transformation, and, therefore, the retelling of such a story acts to close off the narrative space to dialogue with others. This is not to suggest that Dalits not tell this story, but rather that it is the type of story that should be deployed selectively and strategically in tandem with positive identity and awareness education. Though not a strong example of Cobb's sense of "narrative violence", this narrative does little to challenge the perpetual narrative violence that Dalits face in the public sphere. It does little to "thicken" the narrative life of Dalits. In fact, due to the ambiguity involved in Dalit listeners hearing such a story coming from Dr Ambedkar's *own* experience, listeners get caught up in what Francesca Polletta calls "narrative ellipsis" – a process in which the stories activists tell compel other activists to retell the story to better understand the ambiguous meaning of the events described. The story itself has a life. Failure to engage the story as a constantly changing system leaves activists unable to strategically use the story to its full potentials.

By reproducing the inexplicable inhumanity in such a story, the activist unwittingly reifies the community's own sense of separated identity and victimization, and does little to open the opportunity for dialogue and narrative shift among others in the wider public sphere. In addition, high-caste detractors can, and do, use such a narrative to convince low-castes to stay within the Hindu fold reasoning that caste is not just a Hindu problem (which is indeed counter to Ambedkar's own analysis of the caste system). In short, the narrative space this story opens, as it is currently deployed by Dalits, does little to create social agency and/or even the social justice equation for Dalits or low-caste communities. So how do anti-caste activists fashion stories that will better open the space for thick narrative that engenders authentic dialogue with others? This has been the perennial challenge for modern anti-caste activists. Failure to strategically develop and systematically deploy stories of oppression that devalue separateness of identity and simultaneously value liberty, fraternity, and collective awareness of injustice, has fractured and splintered the anti-caste movement. Such fracturing among anti-caste activists has left them unable to influence the hearts and minds of higher caste Indians.

Another more mainstream and consistent narrative that one hears when studying Ambedkarite communities worldwide is the nationalist story of Dr Ambedkar as the source/father of the Indian Constitution. Yet, such a dominant narrative has divergent meanings in different social communities

and contexts. For Dalit communities, the faith in the rule of law is strong and India's 1949 Constitution is a source of pride as the penultimate legal resource to ensure rights for the marginalized. This is why Ambedkar memorial statues throughout India show the Indian Constitution tucked under his left arm as a steadfast Dr Ambedkar points toward a desired egalitarian future. As the head of the drafting commission for the Constitution, Dr Ambedkar is seen by Dalits as *the* author of this important document, despite the more complex negotiated realities of his co-authorship. Even the more complicated and revolutionary aspects of Dr Ambedkar's long career outside of government seem to be sidelined in nationalist narratives about him. Dalit friends have told me that it is the Constitution more than any other document that Ambedkar authored, including the revered *Annihilation of Caste*, which cements his anti-caste legacy. The narrative of Ambedkar as first law minister and nationalist hero trumps more complicated historical readings of him both within and outside Dalit communities. Indeed, it is within anti-caste activist circles, that an acritical reverence for Dr Ambedkar as a father of the nation, as well as the progenitor of a mass move to Buddhism, conspires to narrow the narrative impact of Ambedkar outside of Dalit communities. Still, in all strata of Indian society, a shallow collective understanding of Dr Ambedkar's legacy and impacts exists. In heeding Cobb's call for attention to narrative patterns we must analyze not simply prevailing low-caste narratives of Dr Ambedkar and his followers, but also the narratives of high castes, if we hope to transform future-going narrative violence.

As an important father of the nation, Dr Ambedkar is remembered and memorialized by members of the privileged castes in an even more one-dimensional nationalist way than among Dalit communities. For the privileged castes, rather than the father of a democratic rule of law, or a social reformer, Ambedkar is one father (among many) of an India that is independent from outside rule. In the same league with Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and other nationalist forefathers of the nation, in this perspective, Dr Ambedkar is a symbol of national unity and has little to do with caste oppression or social reform. Here, Ambedkar is a symbol of freedom and independence, but this freedom is nationalistic and amorphous – not tied to any one community, but to India as a unified and predominantly Hindu independent nation. In turn, Dalit reverence of Dr Ambedkar as an archetype for the rule of law is understood by privileged castes as simply supporting the nationalist narrative and in no way challenging Hindu privilege. In a sense then, as a source or a father of the Indian nation, Ambedkar

legacy is mollified by both Dalits' and privileged castes' nationalistic narrative expressions about him. The reverence for Ambedkar is not lost, but rather transfigured into a call for national unity, as opposed to a critique of power. The dominant one-dimensional view of Ambedkar as nationalist father and author of the Constitution meld together in ways that work to mask more complicated and revolutionary narratives about him and forestall any constructive dialogue and/or criticism about his revolutionary ideas for social change.

The Babasaheb of most Dalits' imagination, a Dr Ambedkar as a revolutionary-change-agent and public intellect, are secondary narratives for the majority of caste Hindus. The nationalist narrative of Ambedkar as an important father of the independent nation has relegated the intellectual and social revolution he spurred to the domain of divided and contested histories. Such divided histories go unnoticed by the dominant castes and the more radical statements of Ambedkar have become sanitized in the public sphere. Dalits' view of B.R. Ambedkar as revolutionary activist is largely invisible to many privileged higher castes. The fact is that the Dalit conception of Babasaheb, as a change agent and radical, is not a conception most high-caste Hindus ever encounter.

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