

CHAPTER – VI

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I

The foregoing discussion has highlighted Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's own conception about a just society. It is seen that the term 'just' has different connotations in different settings – historical, contextual, philosophical or theoretical. That is why, to conceptualize such a term and explain that in a very specific method becomes a difficult task for any observer. Although such a term in its basic meaning appears to be society-specific or culture-specific but in the ultimate analysis, it transcends all such limitations with its universal appeal and application.

This is exactly the case with Dr. Ambedkar. Although the issue is related with Indian situation, but at the end and with the final construction, the problem becomes a problem of all people confronted with any social discrimination. That is why, one has to place Dr. B.R. Ambedkar against the universal backdrop and it will be too narrow to describe him only as the leader of the depressed classes in India.

Against this background, attempts have been made to examine Dr. Ambedkar's views on 'just society'. Since he had to pass through several stages in life, the final construction of the idea of 'just society' can be said to be the culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's entire thought process.

II

Let us begin with an analysis of Dr. Ambedkar as a leader and a maker of modern India. It may not be out of place here to mention that quality of leadership depends on many factors – social and others. In this frame, if one places Dr. Ambedkar, one may draw the conclusion that Ambedkar was destined to be a leader – a fighter against all social evils which he had to confront throughout his life before becoming Dr. B.R. Ambedkar! A visionary and a creative thinker as he was, Ambedkar could easily identify the basic social (including political and economic) problems and provided in his own way, the ways and means to solve them.

His understanding of the Indian social system inspired him to wage a relentless struggle against the denial of social justice, economic opportunities and human dignity. Needless to mention, he was all for the establishment of a just and humane social order free from the artificially created barriers based on religion, caste and other considerations. Ambedkar put forth his views in a frank and fearless manner inviting displeasure and criticism from many of his contemporaries. His conviction was so deep-rooted that he even did not spare the Hindu society which was infested with out-model customs, meaningless rituals and age-old dogmas. In fact, one may find this to be the immediate cause for Ambedkar's plan of action for social transformation.

Any objective and analytical assessment of Ambedkar's ideas should begin with his own perception of 'self-development' of man. This was necessary as it would help a man identify his own position in the society. He believed that only liberal education could eradicate social evils and one may find this assertion when at the age of twenty, he could write:

"Let your mission, therefore, be to educate and preach the idea of education to those at least who are near to and in close contact with you."

This was, perhaps, the reason why Ambedkar could say that in the strongly regimented social structure of the Hindu society, individuals belonging to the down-trodden segment had very little or no scope to move higher even with the help of education. The Hindu social structure was equated with a tower with no ladder or window. He believed that the Hindu society consisted of three parts: the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the Untouchables. His construction of logic and arguments dealt a serious blow to the orthodox Indian minds and set a stage for the reconstruction of the Indian society in general and that of Hindu society in particular for achieving his desired goal – a just and human society.

With a very searching insight, Professor Upendra Baxi in his paper under the title, "Emancipation of Justice: Legacy and Vision of Dr. Ambedkar" has tried to conceptualize his basic ideas keeping in mind the different phases of his life as:

- (i) The First Ambedkar – a student who had to face the consequences of evil practices of untouchability;

- (ii) The second Ambedkar – a student-scholar who devoted his entire thought process in constructing his own logic of arguments and conclusions;
- (iii) The third Ambedkar – a militant Ambedkar engaged in drawing attention of the right thinking people to the evils of caste-ridden system and other related issues;
- (iv) The fourth Ambedkar – looking for the reorganization of the Hindu society on two main principles – equality and absence of casteism;
- (v) The fifth Ambedkar – asking for reservation in the legislature and that too challenging the established leadership in the community;
- (vi) The sixth Ambedkar – engaging himself in the tasks like transfer of power, making of India's Constitution and nation-building.

At this point, one may recall his very critical observation about the plight of the down-trodden people when he said:

“There have been many Mahatmas in India whose sole object was to remove Untouchability and to elevate and absorb the Depressed Classes, but everyone of them has failed in this mission. Mahatmas have come, Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained Untouchables.” (The Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables, 1947).

III

A brief reference to Ambedkar's ideas on equality and justice will strengthen the points advanced so far. It may not be an exaggeration to say that his primary aim was to transform on 'apolitical' masses into a crucial and decisive factor in the political power structure. It has been very correctly observed that while the western liberal education provided him with the weapon for broadening the support base for the cause of the down-trodden, the Indian philosophies gave him the basic foundation of 'soul-force'. Given the Indian context, Ambedkar was of the strong opinion that religion should be viewed from three perspectives – a) as a social force; b) as a knowledge for the ideal scheme; c) as a set standard for judging the value of the ideal scheme.

While analysing Ambedkar's views on society, economy and polity in general terms, it should not be forgotten that his idea of equality and social justice had a specific point of reference – The orthodox Hindu social order. It should be kept in mind that he was not a theoretician or philosopher in the formal or conventional sense of the term. Being essentially a pragmatist who drew his knowledge from his own experiences, he put forward his ideas on equality and justice which may not, in many ways, match with any kind of accepted views on this subjects – both Indian and western. This appears to be a 'problematic' area to some to understand the logic of his construction of arguments for equality and social justice.

The crux of the problem seems to have originated from the fact that Ambedkar cannot be bracketed with any particular 'issue' – be it Fabian, Gandhian or Maxian. His ideas were essentially his own conditioned by the prevailing social, economic and political order. His method of identifying the roots of social evils and ways to remove them can be considered to be a superb example of what is known as 'praxis' – blending of policies and actions.

Ambedkar is better known as the believer of 'self-respect' model of man which puts emphasis on education, self-help, self-assertion and self-organization. Apparently on this count, one may find his close approximation with Gandhi although on many issues there had been fundamental differences between them.

IV

Before concluding, a few words about Dr. Ambedkar's legacy to the 'Dalits' can be stated. Ambedkar preferred the term 'Depressed Classes' as it broadens the scope of the term to include within its fold the whole of the down-trodden segment of the society. He was all making a good number of institutional as well as legal provisions for the protection of the interests of the oppressed classes. The debates in the Constituent Assembly conclusively prove that he made every effort to accommodate his ideas in the provisions of the Constitution. To him, untouchability is not a religious system but "an economic system which is worse than slavery". His deep and penetrating insight convinced him that Indian society, in general, suffers from many contradictory and conflictual limitations which, he believed, could be thrown

away by an “operative man”, taking an active and decisive part in the process of social transformation.

It will be very much relevant if I may be allowed to quote Professor K. Raghavendra Rao, an eminent political scientist and a great scholar of repute on the way the intellectuals of to-day look upon Dr. Ambedkar in their academic exercises. To quote him:

“We are now taking the trouble of looking at Ambedkar’s theory and thought as an almost ritualistic exercise..... prompted by the emergence of increasingly aggressive ‘Dalit’ power. This applies to the entire Indian intellectual system – its institutional channels, its prophets and its practioners ... we as a nation should feel ashamed that we have condemned to silence one of the brilliant and concerned voices of modern India. nevertheless, it is never too late to make amends”.

(Babasaheb Ambedkar: History, Society and Polity: An Exploration in Indian Theory).