AMBEDKAR’S HUMANISTIC CONVICTIONS TO THE DALIT SOCIETY

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A large number of the books and papers on Dr. Ambedkar’s life, mission and his contribution to the dalit society have been written and published by many great scholars but no one has yet tried to retrieve him as a human. This paper is the modest attempt to examine and analyse Dr. Ambedkar’s humanistic approach to the dalit communities. The first part of this study deals with fundamental types of the human nature. In the second part I have tried to find the origins of Dr. Ambedkar’s Humanistic Convictions. At last, before concluding, I have left no stone unturned to find the proofs of Dr. Ambedkar’s unflinching humanistic convictions. Several instances in his life which bears testimony to his humanitarian concern and convictions, have been mentioned to justify the purpose of this study.

Human Being is a social animal and has a tendency to govern and to be governed by a set of rules framed by the society itself. Creative and possessive are two fundamental types of human nature. Creative humans use human intellect for creative endeavours which enriches human thought; knowledge and wealth and thereby contribute to the development of human heritage for the posterity. Possessive people, on the other hand do not believe in the use of human intellect for creative purpose. Rather, they believe in appropriation, amassing and even usurpation of the products of the labour of the creative people. This type of people possess a strong urge to become the governing class by all means in order to
achieve their aims. Lesser the degree of civilisation in the society, greater is the probability of succeeding this type of people in becoming the governing class. However, in a more civilised society the creative people can offer resistance to possessive people and try to safeguard their interests. This is a continuous process in the human society. Karl Marx has scientifically analysed this conflict by applying the principles of dialectical materialism to the sphere of social phenomenon and described it as the historical materialism. Slavery, apartheid, gender bias and caste system are the abominable creations of possessive peoples for the exploitation of creative people. These are evils created by man for the exploitation of man.

Those, who have raised their voices against these evils and given a relentless fight against the prevailing social order of their times in order to free the creative peoples from the shackles imposed on them have become immortal personalities in the human history. Some of these great persons are better known as founders of religions. The names of Gautam Buddha; Jesus Christ and Guru Nanak may be placed for example. Some have become famous as saints as Kabeer, Ravidas and Tukarama. Some have become source of inspiration and guidance to the underprivileged classes as Krantiba Jotiba Phoolay and Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker and some are revered even more than Gods as Bharatratna Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar.2 Gautam Buddha, Jesus Christ, Guru Nanak, Kabeer, Ravidas, Tukarama, Krantiba Jotirao Phoolay; Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar belong to the great class of exalted Homo sapience called as Humanists.3

Dr. Ambedkar was truly a multi-faceted personality. A veritable emancipator of Dalits, a great national leader and patriot, a great author, a great educationist, a great political philosopher, a great religious guide and above all a great humanist without any parallel among his contemporaries. All these facets of Dr. Ambedkar’s personality had strong humanistic underpinnings.4 It is only regrettable that the press in the past as well as the contemporary has projected Ambedkar mainly as a great social

"Global Religious Vision, Vol. 3/IV"
rebel and a bitter critic of the Hindu religion. Critics of Dr. Ambedkar have ignored his basic humanistic instincts and strong humanitarian convictions behind his every act or speech throughout his life. It is, therefore, very important to trace the origin and consolidation of his humanistic convictions.

Dr. Ambedkar in his younghood was being humiliated again and again by the upper caste. Why did the people ill-treat him in this way when he had not committed any sin? He was born in the Mahar caste and it was the belief of many Hindus that this caste is low and those born in this caste should not be touched by people of the other castes. Like the people of the Mahar caste, people of many other castes are called ‘untouchables’ and have suffered injustice for hundreds of years. Seeing all this, his mind became a volcano of bitter feelings and thus he thought to fight to protect the human values in the society.

Dr. Ambedkar’s father, Subhedar Ramji was a known follower of the Kabeerpanth. Many of the Kabir’s *Dohas* are the veritable gems of rationalism and the most daring expressions of the humanitarian beliefs. Dr. Ambedkar’s mind was thus deeply imbued with Kabeer’s philosophy in the childhood days. On passing his matriculation examination, he was felicitated by his teacher and was presented with a copy of a book on the life of Buddha. This gift must have made a profound impact on the mind of young Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar stayed in America, the land of liberty, for his higher studies. There he studied the western liberal thought and the humanitarian philosophy expounded by great thinkers such as Prof. John Dewey, who was also his teacher, John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke, and Prof. Harold Laski to name a few. The impact of this original thinker on Dr. Ambedkar’s mind is evident from the frequent quotations one comes across in his writings and speeches. The contrast between the social milieu which he lived in, and the liberal academic thought he studied could not have resulted in anything but making him an ardent humanist.

Following events in the life of Dr. Ambedkar bears testimony to his humanitarian concerns and convictions.
Untouchables were barred, however; the animals were allowed to use the water of the Chawdar tank in the Mahad town of Maharashtra. This inhuman attitude of the society was challenged by Dr. Ambedkar to usher a new era of social revolution moving in for Mahand Tank Satyagraha. On 20th March 1927, 10,000 satyagrahis assembled at Mahad under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar and marched to the Chawdar tank to assert their human right to drink the water from the public place. The procession was attacked by Hindu castes and many satyagrahis were injured by them. There were many ex-military persons among the satyagrahis who had shown their bravery during the World War-I. They could have retaliated in a befitting manner. However, Dr. Ambedkar appealed to his comrades not to indulge in violence.

In the another instance, on 2nd March, 1930 in the Kalaram Mandir Satyagrah, many satyagrahis were stoned heavily and grievously injured by the castes Hindu. The satyagrahis wanted to retaliate. But Babasaheb always displayed the wisdom of a statesman; qualities of a leader, the courage of a hero and endurance of a martyr. He advised them to remain peaceful and not to retaliate aggressively. Only a person who is the humanist to his innermost core can show such steadfast faith in the non-violence in such situation.

In the field of politics also, Dr. Ambedkar remain firm with his convictions. Signing the Pune pact is perhaps the ultimate testimony of Dr. Ambedkar’s humanitarian credentials. He had appealed to the Mahatma Gandhi not to drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of the people. He ended his comments on Gandhi’s fast by valiantly declaring that “I can never consent to deliver my people bound hand and foot to the Caste Hindus for generations to come” this is what he was constrained to do. Indian history would have been written differently, and with it the destinies of the downtrodden untouchables, if Ambedkar had responded to Gandhi’s threat to fast unto death, by himself offering similar self-immolation as a strategy of persuading the Mahatma. Instead, he chose the strategy
of compromise and denunciation. He derived satisfaction in calling Gandhi’s fast as unheroic and as an ‘adventure’, saying there was “noting noble about it” and it was a “foul and a filthy act” bound.\textsuperscript{11} He was fully aware of the reason for Gandhi’s fast and also the consequence of signing the pact, yet only on the humanitarian ground to save the life of Gandhi he did it.\textsuperscript{12}

Fundamental rights assured to all citizens of our country is a great leap towards establishing the basic human values in the society that was based on graded inequality.\textsuperscript{13} As the chairperson of the constitution drafting committee Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in the incorporation of the principle of fundamental rights in the constitution.

Dr. Ambedkar was a firm believer in the parliamentary democracy. That is why, when the fear of fascism represented by Hitler was looming large over the world, he decided to cooperate with the British government in its fight against the fascism.\textsuperscript{14} Because as a humanist he could foresee the dangerous consequences of the victory of the fascism. Today some myopic people criticise Dr. Ambedkar for this. However, by criticising Dr. Ambedkar on this score, they inadvertently expose their fascist leanings.

His heartiest feelings may be examined from what he had spoken to untouchables that “My heart breaks to see the pitiable sight of your faces and to hear your sad voices. You have been groaning from time immemorial and yet you are not ashamed to hug your helplessness as an inevitability. Why did you not perish in the prenatal stage instead? Why do you worsen and sadden the picture of the sorrows, poverty, slavery and burdens of the world with your deplorable, despicable, detestable and miserable life? You had better died and relieved this world if you could not rise to a new life and if you could not rejuvenate yourself. As a matter of fact, it is your birth right to get food, shelter and clothing in equal proportion with every individual, high or low. If you believe in living a respectable life you should believe in self-help which is the best help.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{April 2003}
Ambedkar was, par excellence, a spokesman of ignored humanity—the workers, small peasants and landless labourers. He expressed the sorrows of untouchables and tried sincerely to channel the activities of the depressed classes. In mobilising them he created a sense of self-respect and pride in them. He dedicated his life to the cause of removal of untouchability and completely identified himself with the socially segregated section of Indian Society. He also categorically declared: “It is my solemn vow to die in the service and cause of the downtrodden people among whom I was born, I was brought up and I am living.”

According to Dr Ambedkar’s own definition, “A great man must be motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and must act as the scourge and the scavenger of society. These are the elements which distinguish an eminent individual from a great man and constitute his title-deeds to respect and reverence.” Indeed, he himself fulfilled all the conditions of being a great man.

If he wanted, he would have collected abundant wealth, could have reached the highest position in political life and would have lived the life of comforts, instead he lived a life of struggle and sacrifice for the sake of human values. His life mission was as depicted in that Sanskrit sloka:

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\begin{align*}
&नृत्यहम् कामये राज्यम् \\
&न स्वरंसं च पुर्णभगम्। \\
&कामये दुःखः तत्तजायम् \\
&प्राणिनामालिन्त नाशानम्।
\end{align*}
\]

“Neither I want kingdom nor paradise or salvation, 
I only desire, the sufferings of the sick be eliminated”.

The human person, born unchained and with all paragons of virtues is reduced to a broken and disintegrated man by the perverted human Mephistopheles whose claws, fangs and Satanicpsyche reach the collective social conscience. The devil’s tyranny has also been sanctified under God’s assumed mandate, which has drafted by
none other than the Devilish evil human genius. Ambedkar schematised the reclamation of the broken man and saved the destruction of the ‘Being’ to the non-being. The existing international standards of civilisation and human rights denounce and despise the Apartheid and its horrendous tyranny.\textsuperscript{20}

A few months before his Mahaparinirvana he embraced Buddhism. It was a great tribute of a great humanist to the greatest humanistic philosophy of Buddha. By initiating millions of his follower in to the Buddhist fold, he asserted his faith in the humanistic values preached by Buddha in alleviating the sufferings of his lot. His exposure to Buddhism took place at the age of 16. The core of his philosophy of life was the basic tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity.\textsuperscript{21}

Now while concluding this study, it should be admitted that Dr. Ambedkar was a great world class Humanists and his humanistic convictions may not be measured within few pages of this study paper. Yet I have tried my level best to discover his heart. His dedication to the world of ideas was life-long. He immersed himself in the world of ideas and came up with his own perspectives in an attempt to find answers to the problems posed by his life experience. In fact Ambedkar on many occasions used to be very rigid and dogmatic in his demands but whenever the situation turned to be very critical he withdrew some of his demands and came to a compromise. Although he spoke of strong resistance and virility he never attempted to disturb the peace and order. He thus reached the pinnacle of the humanism.

REFERENCES

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2. \textit{Ibid.}
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