

# Ambedkar's contributions in the upliftment of downtrodden

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## Abstract

*This study deals with the contributions of the Father of Indian Constitution, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar for the upliftment of downtrodden. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, acknowledged as a warrior for the rights of the downtrodden in India, was an eminent educationist, a political philosopher, distinguished social reformer and a competent parliamentarian. He stood for the rights of marginalized communities including women. He was the spokesperson of untouchables and other backward caste people. He was the protector of the exploited people of our society and made continuous, unbending efforts for the liberation of equality from the barriers of castes and religions. His whole life was devoted for social transformation of the Hindu society by strengthening the social life of the marginalized and the excluded.*

*Dr. Ambedkar, born in a poor Dalit family, had to face severe discriminations from every corner of the society as his parents hailed from the Hindu Mahar caste which was viewed as "untouchable" by the upper class. He fought for his rights and struggled to achieve the heights of success and also became the voice of several victims of caste discrimination and untouchability. He became the first Law Minister of India after independence and the father of Indian Constitution. The text prepared by Dr. Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protection for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens. Several Articles were incorporated in the Indian Constitution for the upliftment of the Dalits and women which included the abolishment of untouchability and discrimination against them, provided equal status with other upper castes, provisions of fundamental rights to all, equal protection of laws, voting rights and reservation in education, jobs, promotion and political fields to them etc.*

*This is all possible because the provisions of Constitution drafted by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. Therefore, in true sense, he can be considered as the God father of Dalits.*

**Keywords:** upliftment, Downtrodden, Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar.

## Introduction

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar was born into a Mahar (an Untouchable or Dalit) family. In childhood, Ambedkar faced the social stigma of caste discrimination. Although he and his other Dalit friends attended school, they were segregated from that of Brahmins and other upper classes students and were given little attention or assistance by teachers. They were often asked by teachers not to sit inside the class. Ambedkar and his classmates belonging to lower castes often faced such acrid discriminations in their school, they are not even allowed to touch the vessel containing water in school; if they wanted to drink water, then only the peon could offer them water. And sometimes if peon is not available in school, then they had to remain without water, "no peon, no water" in his writing describes this wretched situation.

He was very fond of learning and due to this Bhim was the first Dalit to get admission in the prestigious Elphinstone High School in Bombay and later won the Baroda State Scholarship for three years and finished his postgraduate education from Columbia University in New York. He completed his M.A. examination in June 1915 and continued his research. In his thesis on Castes in India (1916) presented at the Columbia University, he wrote

"The caste problem is a vast one, both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that pretends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but capable of much wider mischief, for as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem."

In 1918, Dr. Ambedkar became a successful Professor of political economy at Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai but there also he had faced discrimination with other professors in sharing drinking water jug.

## Movement against social stigma of untouchability

B. R. Ambedkar faced indiscrimination at every walk of his life at childhood, in school, in colleges, at workplaces. He did not like the pity of other for the untouchables. Ambedkar in his testimony before the Southborough Committee (who was preparing for the Government of India Act 1919), argued for the introduction of separate electorates and reservations for Dalits and other marginalized communities. On 20th July 1924, Dr. Ambedkar set up the central

institution Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha with intention to promote education and socio-economic uplifting of the depressed classes. The age of self-respect dawned with the birth of the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha.

Ambedkar had personal experience of the sting of humiliation and injustice of being a Dalit. He hated the pity of others on any untouchable. In his view, others could not uplift the 'untouchables'. Justice cannot be granted by others. Those who suffer because of injustice should themselves secure justice. Ambedkar realised that the 'untouchables' had lost their individuality for centuries and it was impossible to wake up them through speeches and slogans; it needs active movement. He determined to protest against the blind and unrighteous beliefs of the Hindus. The Chowdar Tank Satyagraha was a consequence of this decision.

### Awareness via Periodicals

Mooknayak (the leader of the dumb, 1920) Dr B. R. Ambedkar believed that if Dalits were to be awakened and emancipated, they needed to have publications of their own. With this belief, he began publishing Marathi fortnightly *Mooknayak* on 31 January 1920. "Mooknayak" means the hero of the voiceless or dumb. In the editorial of *Mooknayak*'s inaugural issue, Dr. Ambedkar wrote, "There is no better source than the newspaper to suggest the remedy against the injustice that is being done to our people in the present and will be done in the future and also to discuss the ways and means for our progress in the future."

He also wrote that "The Hindu society is just like a tower which has several stories without a ladder or entrance. The man who is born in the lower storey cannot enter the upper storey however worthy he may be and the man who is born in the upper storey cannot be driven out into the lower storey however unworthy he may be ... The alienation produced by the absence of inter-dining and inter-caste marriages has fostered the feelings of touchable and untouchables so much that these touchable and untouchable castes, though a part of Hindu society, are in reality living in worlds apart."

Ambedkar determined to overthrow the social evil of untouchability. To shield the rights of oppressed and to ignite the flame of awareness against injustice and inequality he started five periodicals; *Mooknayak* (the leader of the dumb, 1920), *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Ostracized India, 1924), *Samta* (Equality, 1928), *Janata* (The People, 1930) and *Prabuddha Bharat* (Enlightened India, 1956).

Ambedkar wrote about 40 articles for *Mooknayak* and all of them made protest against caste inequality. In April 1923, publication ceased in *Mooknayak* because of serious conflict between Dr. Ambedkar and its second editor Dhruvnath Gholap but it did succeed in its objective of generating a wave of consciousness among the oppressed. From April 1927 to 1929, Dr. Ambedkar drove another fortnightly named, *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Ostracized India, 1924).

Babasaheb's journalism was purely dedicated to the struggle for the upliftment of Untouchables.

### Ambedkar's Writings

Ambedkar devoted his entire life for establishing the principles of democratic and republican ideals in the country so that every citizen would get equality, fraternity and freedom. Ambedkar protested injustice had been happening with non- brahmin, minorities and other oppressed. He was an eminent writer too and had written many books, writing memoranda, evidence and statement, research documents, review of articles and books and preface and predictions. Apart from this he was also the author of our Constitution. In the field of journalism also Dr. Ambedkar's contribution is surpassing and unparalleled. We can see his tremendous efforts to administer justice to oppressed through his writings.

The paper entitled 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' was read by B. R. Ambedkar at an anthropological seminar of Alexander Goldenweiser in New York on 9 May 1916. In this study, Ambedkar made a presentation of a social phenomenon that emerged from the strategy of the Brahmins who adopted a strictly endogamous matrimonial regime, leading the other groups to do the same in order to emulate this self-proclaimed elite. He quoted that "the superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste".

'Annihilation of Caste' was an undelivered speech (later self-published by the Ambedkar) to be delivered at the annual conference in 1936 in which he criticised the Hindu religion, its caste system and its religious texts which are male dominant and spreading hatred and suppression of female interests. The leader asserted that inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage are not sufficient to annihilate the caste system, but that "the real method of breaking up the Caste System was... to destroy the religious notions upon which caste is founded".

Dr. Ambedkar had elaborated the theory of the origin of Untouchables in his book entitled 'The Untouchables' published in October 1948, discussed various aspects of untouchability which is affliction of the Hindu society. Time is witness of several types of slavery existed in the world. Dr. Ambedkar elaborates how the slavery in different parts of the world disappeared and why it still exists in our country.

The book entitled 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables' published in 1945, scrutinizes the efforts that the Congress and Gandhi have done for the Untouchables and pulls them up for not being on the right track. The book affirms that the Congress used the issue of emancipation of the Shudras as a tool to advance its political interests. It speaks that the Congress' programme for emancipation of the Shudras is more about publicity and less about honest efforts.

Another book 'Who were the Shudras?' scrutinizes the history of the origin of the Shudras. All the books and writings of Ambedkar tried hard to emancipate oppressed to remove the black stigma of untouchability from our society.

### **Framer of the Constitution of India**

Dr. Ambedkar, the chairman of the constitution drafting committee emphasized on the construction of a virtual bridge between all classes of the society. According to him, it would be unfeasible to maintain the unity of the country if the gaps among the classes were not filled up. He put particular stress on religious, gender and caste equality. He got support of the Assembly to introduce reservation for the people belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in education, government jobs and civil services.

### **Adoption of more scientific religion**

At a small conference held in Yeola, Nashik, Ambedkar declared that he was born a Hindu, but would not die as one. Highlighting reason for the decision, the leader told his followers, "So long as we remain in a religion, which teaches a man to treat another man like a leper, the sense of discrimination on account of caste, which is deeply rooted in our minds, cannot go. For annihilating caste and untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote." He also added how Hinduism had failed to protect basic human rights for his people, sustaining caste injustices instead.

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