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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Architect of Justice, Champion of Equality

Among the galaxy of stalwarts born in the 19th century, who played a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of free India and left an indelible imprint on our national life and polity, the name of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar shines like a star. An architect of Constitution, a messiah and champion of the down-trodden, a rebel against all forms of social and economic iniquities and described by Mahatma Gandhi as a "patriot of sterling worth", Dr. Ambedkar attained the pinnacle of glory by sheer force of his personality, struggle, sacrifice, selflessness, erudition, dedication, devotion and commitment.



Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, affectionately called 'Babasaheb' by millions of his admirers and followers, was born on 14 April 1891 to Ramji Maloji Sankpal and Bhimbai at Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. He belonged to the Mahar community, one of the Hindu untouchable castes. Though economically poor, the family earned respect and regard from neighbors. Ramji, a Subedar-Major in the military service was a Kabir Panthi devotee and moved from one military camp to

another. After his wife's death, Ramji brought up the children with care and affection and used to recite to them devotional lyrics and epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Being a boy belonging to an untouchable community, he had to face all the miseries, humiliations and difficulties. He was not allowed to drink water from the common source, He was forced to study Persian as the Sanskrit teacher refused to teach this language to him, He, however, learnt Sanskrit at later stage, His note books were not corrected nor was he asked any questions for fear of causing pollution', Undaunted by all these challenges, he came to Bombay and joined Elphinstone High School. In 1907, Bhimrao passed his Matriculation examination. Considering this to be a splendid achievement by a 'Mahar boy', the community organized a function and a copy of "The life of Gautama Buddha" was presented to him by one of its members. The book tremendously influenced the life of Bhimrao as is revealed by 'subsequent events in his life.

Considering Bhimrao's interest in education, and his sincerity and zeal for hard work, the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad, not only granted a monthly scholarship of As. 25 during his graduate studies but also invited him to serve in his State after completing graduation: Though he joined the ser vice, he was not happy as the social challenges. unfortunately for him, remained unchanged. The Maharaja then agreed to send him to Columbia University as a Gaekwad scholar on the condition that Bhimrao, on return, would serve the State. At Columbia, Bhimrao was free from the caste stigma and could move about with a status of equality. Prof. Seligman-the famous economist-was his teacher at the University. The academic atmosphere, the free environment and his passion for books enlarged Bhimrao's mental horizon.

In 1915, he obtained his MA (Economics) degree for his thesis "Ancient Indian Commerce". In the following year, he read a paper titled "The Castes in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" in the Anthropology Seminar. In 1916, he was awarded Ph.D. on his thesis "National Dividend for India: A Historic and Analytical Study." The same year, Dr. Ambedkar joined the London School of Economics and Political Science. He also got admission to the famous Gray's Inn for Law. However, he could not pursue his studies as the Maharaja called him back and appointed him as his secretary with the intention of grooming him for the post of the State's Finance Minister. But destiny willed otherwise. To Dr. Ambedkar's dismay and frustration, the social conditions in India remained the same despite his academic excellence arid erudition and the high position he occupied in the State. His own subordinates ill-treated him. Though Dr. Ambedkar brought this to the notice of the Maharaja, nothing could be done. However, the latter was kind enough to release or Dr Ambedkar, after a few months of service, from the bond to serve the State after his education abroad.

He rejoined both the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Gray's Inn to qualify as a barrister. His thesis "Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India" was accepted for the M.Sc. (Economics) degree by the University of London. In 1923, he was conferred the DSc (Economics) for his thesis "The Problem of the Rupee: It's Origin and

Solution" by the University of Bonn in Germany. Despite being busy with his academic work, his intense feelings for the conditions of the socially down-trodden people at home, enabled him to find time to discuss with the Secretary of State for India, E.S. Montague, and Vithal Bhai Patel, the plight and problems of the untouchables.

After attaining a series of academic achievements from prestigious foreign universities, Dr. Ambedkar' returned to India in June 1923 and started legal practice in the High Court of Judicature of Bombay. He took up practice because of his strong feeling that he could carry on his mission of working for the socio-economic betterment of untouchables-through this independent profession. Moreover, this would also ensure his personal livelihood. But in the High Court too, considered to be the temple of justice, Dr. Ambedkar had to suffer humiliation because of the stigma of his caste.

Humiliations, insults and flagrant discrimination strengthened the determination in Dr. Ambedkar to free his fellowmen from the yoke of social slavery. With his emergence on the scene, the flag of rebellion against social injustices and iniquities seemed to have been unfurled. He appealed to his fellowmen to shed from their minds the feelings of being high or low. Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in awakening the depressed classes. He tried to unite the untouchables by establishing organizations, founding political parties and starting newspapers and weeklies to espouse their cause.

In 1920 he started a Marathi fortnightly, the 'Mooknayak' (the Leader of the Dumb). To launch his struggle against untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar founded, in 1924, an organization in Bombay called 'Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha' for the moral and material progress of untouchables. In March 1927 he led a Satyagraha to establish the civic rights of the untouchables to draw water from a public tank, 'Chavador Lake at Mahad in Kolaba District. In 1927 he started another Marathi fortnightly, the 'Bahishkrit Bharat' to ventilate the grievances of the depressed classes. The same year, he started an organization called "Samaj Samata Sangh" to preach social equality among untouchables and caste Hindus. Among others, inter-caste marriage and 6 inter-caste dinner formed parts of the program of the said organization.

In 1936, Dr. Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party of India. In pursuance of the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935. the country went to the polls in 1937 to elect India's first popular legislatures. The Independent Labour Party won 15 of the 17 seats it contested in Bombay. As a Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Ambedkar played a very effective and purposeful role in the Bombay Legislative Assembly and showed his acumen as a seasoned parliamentarian.

Dr. Ambedkar's legal acumen, academic excellence, negotiating skills and administrative abilities, the then Viceroy appointed him in 1942 as one of the Members of the Defense Council. Later, he was given the portfolio of Labour which he held till June 1946, this period, though a short one, is considered as a watershed in the history of labour legislation and labour welfare

in the country. As Labour Member, Dr. Ambedkar succeeded in reserving 5 to 6 per cent posts for untouchables in the Central Government. He also helped the 'untouchable' students keen to take technical education in foreign countries. It was during his tenure as Labour Member that Employment Exchanges were set up so that skilled and semi-skilled labourers and technicians who were being trained under different schemes are not thrown out on the streets but are helped in finding new avenues of employment.

In 1946, when the Interim Government was formed Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's choice for Law Minister fell on Dr. Ambedkar. This came as a unique opportunity for Dr. Ambedkar who having perceived the discrepancies prevailing in the Hindu Society, wanted to bring in some reforms to ameliorate the lot of the Hindu women and untouchables.

The Drafting Committee of Constitution of India, under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar held its first meeting on 30 August 1947. Dr. Ambedkar and his team sat, in all, for 141 days to draw up the provisional Constitution. On most of these occasions, Dr. Ambedkar worked single-handedly. Being an economist, legal luminary and sociologist, Dr. Ambedkar knew very well that the constitution was not merely a legal document but a social and economic parchment encompassing the aspirations, grievances, urges and needs of millions.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had strong views on the Aryan Invasion Theory, which suggested that a group of Indo-European-speaking people, called the Aryans, migrated to India around 1500 BCE. This theory has been a topic of debate among scholars for years. Dr. Ambedkar, however, was critical of this idea, especially because of its connection to the caste system. He believed the Aryan Invasion Theory was used to justify the oppression of the indigenous Dravidian people. According to the theory, the Aryans were portrayed as a superior race who subjugated the Dravidians, which led to the formation of the rigid caste system. This, in turn, contributed to the discrimination against lower castes and marginalized communities.

The theory of the Aryan race set up by Western writers is an utter perversion of scientific facts. It is based on nothing but pleasing assumptions and has no foundation in fact."

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Who Were the Shudras?

Dr Ambedkar argued that there was no solid historical evidence to support this theory. Instead, he believed the caste system evolved over time as a social and cultural construct within Indian society, not due to an external invasion. His rejection of this theory was part of a broader critique of the social and historical forces that had led to the marginalization of Dalits. He championed equality, justice, and the dismantling of oppressive structures.

In addition to his work on social reform, Dr Ambedkar also embodied the spirit of nationalism in India. His dedication to justice and equality made him a symbol of the fight for a truly inclusive India. While most people recognize him for advocating for Dalit rights and his role in drafting the Indian Constitution, his vision went beyond that. He believed that real nationalism

could only be achieved in a society where every citizen, regardless of caste or background, was treated with dignity and respect.

Dr Ambedkar's view of nationalism was centered on empowering the oppressed, especially Dalits and marginalized groups. He saw caste discrimination as a major barrier to national unity and believed that a nation with such inequalities could never be truly united or progressive. His contributions to India's independence movement were crucial, though they were distinct from those of leaders like Gandhi or Nehru. Dr Ambedkar's advocacy for the political and social rights of the oppressed laid the foundation for a more just and strong nation. His promotion of liberty, equality, and fraternity turned him into a powerful symbol of Indian nationalism, reminding us that true national identity must be inclusive, secular, and built on justice for all.

It is an axiomatic truth that for centuries the 'untouchables' in India were denied the benefit of basic education. Realizing the importance of education in one's life. Dr. Ambedkar persuaded his followers to educate their children. He attached so much significance to education that he made 'Education' the very first step of his trio-slogan of action "Educate. Agitate and organize".

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Reference:

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