Abstract: B.R. Ambedkar an original thinker and a man who knew India like his backhand was an advocate for the masses – The downtrodden and the poor. He worked very hard despite being from oppressed poor strata of society. He fought injustice and inequality and advocated the cause of the poor and downtrodden.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, affectionately called Babasaheb has been held as among the greatest Indians of the first sixty years of the 20th century. At the very outset of his public career he was much hated by the Congress men, and even the radical circles, despite their commitment to the concept of equality as fundamental to a wandering of society, considered him to be a political reactionary and pro-imperialist. Though Ambedkar remained consistently loyal to the British Government in India, he was never less of a patriot that the Congress leaders. Only his properties were different. He wanted to "fight the two thousand year old tyranny and oppression of the caste Hindu and secure social equality." He was not opposed to liberty; he ardently desired and immediate transfer of power-as much as the congressmen, but he wanted for the depressed classes their rightful place under the sun of freedom. He could not fight on both the fronts, so he concentrated his fire on the issue of social suppression as against political liberty, and due to his he seemed to be traitor to the nationalist cause but in reality, he had a case and had been wronged and reviled unjustly by the Congress and the nationalist press.

We are fully aware of the fact that Ambedkar came from the poorest and the most oppressed strata of society. He had such a burning desire for learning and such a flaming passion to fight injustice as he rose to great heights blowing to bits by his own shining actions and example the whole specious reasoning that lay behind the theories of race, heredity and caste based on birth as against merit. It was his conviction that education would unlock the doors of opportunity and advancement for the oppressed classes and other backward sections. He believed, "without knowledge there can be no power", and this he maintained till end of his life. It is to be remembered, after his return from England, Babasaheb took service as Military Secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda, but was unhappy as he was subjected to unimaginable suffering. He felt utterly humiliated. The treatment at the hands of caste Hindus was so terrible that he decided to go back to Bombay. And, finally, he wanted to take up the cause of the Depressed classes who were the victims of horrible oppression. He himself began to interest take in the problems of the said classes. Foremost among these issues were the issues of political rights, education, clean and better living and so on.

At the very outset, Ambedkar did the Depressed classes one notable service, he placed their case before the South Borough Committee which was investigating the question of representation. His memorandum was a valuable contribution to the discussion on this important issue. The memorandum makes interesting comments on the outlook of the then political parties. The Congress had been captured by the Tilakities and other radicals in 1916. They had made liberal settlement with the Muslims, but they didn't think essential to display any sympathy for the depressed classes. Babasaheb characterized them as "Political radicals and social Tories". The liberals and moderates were somewhat better, they made some provisions for the backward class representation, but it was insignificant and inadequate. Besides Khaparde said, "Those who work for the elevation of the untouchable are themselves degraded". Ambedkar held, Brahmin dominated intelligentsia who spoke "in the name of all" but represented only his own caste. There were some "Rational Brahmins" but they admitted "the frightful nature of the institution of untouchability in the abstract and perceived the danger of the society with which it is fraught".

It was he who revived the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha – devoted to the upliftment of the Depressed classed and began to work from the amalioration of the "Mahars, Dheds and Chamars", was free from any political objection", and was led
by its only "noteworthy member". He had been fighting against discriminatory practices since the South Borough report in 1919. On his advice, this Sabha fought the million owners' propensity to pander to the prejudices of their case Hindu workers. Another important point is to be noted that he had soft corner for the socialists and communists in India because the latter had a naive trust in the magical properties of industrialization and modernization. They firmly believed that they would dissolve old prejudices, religious antagonism and group loyalties and would faster among the working class solidarity and class consciousness. However, the Indian reality contradicted these fond beliefs and Babasaheb raised the pertinent question why these "progressive" trade unions and their leaders did not renounce the exclusion of Depressed Class workers from the weaving sheds? The Marxists were victims of theories copied from Europe; they acted without taking into account the unpleasant and peculiar Indian realities. He wanted to fight not only the bourgeoisie order but also the social system based on inequality.

The Sabha gradually gained strength and its leaders were of great fame. His opponents would say notoriety. From construction activities he soon switched to protest, agitation and direct action. When foreign rulers were to get redressal of economic grievances – oppression by indigo planters in Champaran in Bihar, land revenue remissions in Gujarat and for winning Swaraj. Babasaheb decided to use the weapon on Civil Disobedience to fight social wrongs and injustice. However, the satyagraha struggle in Mahad was launched to assert the rights of the Depressed Classed to draw water from the tank-a municipal property. The struggle became memorable on account of the recourse by him to civil disobedience which he described in his valedictory address to the constituted Assembly 21 years later, as a "Grammar of Anarchy". He also started Nasik Temple entry Satyagraha in the 30's. But on the whole he didn't believe in recourse to direct action. He believed in constitutional democratic action, and civil disobedience as a last resort. He also formed a new party known as the independent Labour Party to contest the election under the 1935 Constitution Act. His success in the reserved scheduled castes seats was spectacular – as the party captured 15 seats in the provincial assembly out of which 13 were reserved seats and two were general seats.

It is noteworthy to state that he had on the one hand, resolved to fight injustice and inequality; on the other he was an Indian in a profound sense. Despite the personal and collective humiliations which Hindu society had heaped on him and his community, at critical moments his patriotism would surface in the unexpected manner. There was in him perpetual yet creative tension between the keen desire for social justice and longing to see India rise to greatness. He thus, was no less nationalist than he most ardent patriot. He was opposed to the federal scheme. He wanted both transfer of responsibility at the centre and democratization of the administration of the Indian States. But he denounced parochialism and provincialism. He declared his faith in the goal of building up a feeling that we are all Indians. I want all people to be Indian first, Indian last and nothing else but Indians...". Once the remarked. No nationalist could match these words which came from the innermost recesses of his heart.

Through he had always been willing to subordinate his personal advancement for the cause of the country, he went on to say "as between the depressed classes and the country, the depressed classes have precedence with him". He held that the question of the betterment of the lot of the Depressed Classes was part of the larger struggle for the establishment of an egalitarian society and this deal could not be achieved without coming to grips with the question of caste system which was the absolute anti thesis of a social order founded on the concept of equality, on the equal worth of all human beings. Of course, he had been sent abroad to study economics and financial problems. But his main interest was centered on the problem of caste. He made it his life mission to understand its genesis and nature and devise means to demolish it.

It was on 9th May, 1916, Ambedkar read a paper ‘Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’ at the anthropological seminar, organized in United State. His essay had the qualities of both charity and courage. Arguing that human society was a network of human relations, he rejected the extreme atomistic view of society. He denounced extreme individualism as the greatest humbug. He observed: individuals make up society is trivial; society is always composed of classes. It may be an exaggeration to assert the theory of class conflict, but the existence of definite classes in a society is a fact. Their basis may differ. They may be economic or intellectual or social, but an individual in a society is always a member of a class. This is a universal fact and early Hindu society could not have been an exception to this rule, and as a matter of fact, we know it well. If we bear this generalization in mind, our study of the genesis of caste would be very much facilitated, for we have only to determine what was the class that first made itself into a caste, for class and caste, so to say, are next door neighbours, and it is only a
span that separates the two. A caste is an enclosed class. It appeared to Babasaheb that four means were employed by Hindu Society to master the problem (i) Sati or the burning of the widow in the funeral pyre of her deceased husband (ii) Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry; (iii) child marriage; and (iv) sanyasa or renunciation.

He rejected the view that the caste system was created by Manu, the law giver. He thought that no one individual, no matter how powerful-could have created the caste system. It is unimaginable that the law of caste was given...Manu did not give the law of caste and...could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He also did not accept the strong orthodox hindu belief that Shatras or Smritis the strong consciously organization and hierarchy of caste. He even questioned the view that the Brahmins created the caste system. He held that Manu only codified the existing caste rules and provided them with a philosophical or religious foundation.

Ambedkar then examined analytically the various theories advanced by western scholars, such as occupational origin as the basis of caste; the system as survival of the ancient tribal organization; cross breeding and migration, but he did not find any of the explanations satisfactory and advanced his own theory or thesis. He believed that the priestly caste, the Brahmins, were the first to become a "self enclosed or dangerous" social unit. They set the fashion, and through what Toynbee called the process of differentiation and stratification taking the form of "self enclosure" and "clos ing the doors" against others. He also held that the "closing in" was accompanied by "closing out". The caste in the "singular" has no meaning and reality. Caste existence only in the plural number. Caste had "no mercy for a sinner" who had the courage to "violate the code". He thought that Indian society was not racially or ethnically pure. It was a mixed society, a racially heterogeneous society. He, therefore, summed up his analysis and conclusion - without taking notice of the colour or racial factor. He observed that there was one caste to start with and that classes has become castes through intimacy and excommunication.

Let it be noted that Babasaheb was not merely a theoretician but also a fighter, a man of action who was acknowledged even by his opponents as a giant among intellectuals. His proclaimed objective was not only the abolition of untouchability, but war against the caste system itself. He advocated not only inter dinning but also inter marriage among the Hindus belonging to various castes must be made common. Abolition of the stigma of untouchability only would mean that they would thereafter treated as other shudras. He wanted to abolish all caste distinctions. The Varmashrama Vyawastha must be destroyed and the principle established that the rights, responsibilities and status shall be determined not by "accident of birth" but "merit alone".

A resolution of calling upon his countrymen to setup an ekavarma Samaj - egalitarian society was also passed and Manusmriti ceremoniously burnt. This was a symbolic act of defiance and it was a red letter day. A multi-pronged attack on the caste system had been launched. A wave of indignation among the orthodox Hindus swept throughout the land, but the rebel Ambedkar was undoubted. He was convinced that it was not possible to break caste without "annihilating the religious notions" on which the system was based. It was his most profound and effect work on the caste system - based on cold logic and reason. And yet it burns with such passion that it can only be compared to the communist manifesto of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. And for us Indians it is much more relevant that the letter. He used his ideas to state forcefully the care not only of social reform, but of social revolution, of the need for a fundamental refashioning of the social structure.

Babasaheb said that was not called for mild reforms such as abolition of child marriage, permission for remarriage and so on. What was called for was a basic reforms which would bring about the break up of the caste system. He drew the attention of his redress to the communal award, and said that it was, in a way, "the nemasis following upon the indifference and neglect of social reform". When the Congress Socialist party wedded to the abolition of economic exploitation and class rule, he asked the socialists, could they neglect the social problem if they wanted to achieve economic reforms? The socialists, consequently, wanted economic reforms or change to have precedence over social change; they claimed that social change was a function of economic change and would automatically follow the latter. However, Ambedkar challenged their view of history and refuted the contention that man was actuated only by economic motives and contested the claim that economic power was the only source of power. He said that the social status of an individual was also a potent source of power and authority. He also said that religion is a source of power as illustrated by India's history. He held that the socialist theory was based on wrong premises. Man would not join in a "revolution for equalization of property", he observed, unless they knew that after revolution
they would be treated equally and that there would be no discrimination based on caste. He further observed, we cannot have any political change of economic change unless you kill the monster caste.

There had been revolutions in other countries of the world, but why had there been no revolution in India – a question that had troubled him. He answered that the lower classed of Hindus had been totally disabled for direct action on account of the wretched system of Chaturvovnya. It was also due to the pernicious caste system of the Hindus that the country lay prostrate at the feet of the victor – had been subjected to foreign domination so often and this country never stood as a whole against aggression. "Had the right to bear arms not been denied to us, our country would never have lost her freedom and no invader could have succeeded in conquering her," said Babasaheb. He held, caste was a notion, a state of mind, not a physical object like a wall of bricks. The base of this mental attitude was the sanctity provided by the Shastras. The real remedy was to free everyone from the "thraldom of the Shastra" and to destroy their sanctity, "Cleanese" the minds of the people and then they would stop obeying caste system or distinctions. He was convinced that the "real remedy" was "intermarriage". Once the religious basis of caste was destroyed the road for this would become clear. He emphatically said: "If you want to save Hinduism, kill Brahmanism". He, in fact, favoured complete change in the fundamental notions of life "as well as" complete change in the value of life".

Another significant point worth mentioning is that Ambedkar remained unaffected by the rising ride of Gandhism. He was an extremely sensitive soul and very intelligent. To natural intelligence was married training and extremely sensitive soul and very intelligent. To natural intelligence was married training and very intelligent. To natural intelligence was married training and very intelligent. To natural intelligence was married training and very intelligent.

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Another significant point worth mentioning is that Ambedkar remained unaffected by the rising ride of Gandhism. He was an extremely sensitive soul and very intelligent. To natural intelligence was married training and education discipline of the highest order. In the western world he had breathed an atmosphere of liberty and equality. He was treated as an individual with a dignity and worth of his own. There was racial prejudices in America; but he saw with his own eyes how the Negroes, armed with the Western ideology that "all men are created equal" were fighting for equal rights. He therefore, was convinced that the emancipation of the depressed classes from the caste Hindus would have to be the work of these classes themselves. The Scheduled Castes would have to work out their salvation themselves.

Apparently, there was much that was common to both Gandhi and Babasaheb both desired to serve the depressed classes and improve their lot. Why then could they not co-operate in the common cause? Why could they not join their forces to fight orthodoxy and oppression? Apart from their different origins and upbringing, a gulf was fixed in their mental make up, outlooks and ideologically they were poles asunder. Ambedkar had not only derived stimuli from the west, but his mind had been captured by the secular western civilization. To him the question of amelioration of the lot of the depressed classes was bound up with the abolition of caste. He was not prepared to compromise on this question, nor to differentiate, in moral terms, between the caste system as it exists today and the "ideal chaturvarna" in the vedas. To him the caste system was the logical and inevitable results of the chaturvanya system based on foreign birth. He, as a result, could not see eye to eye with those like the Arya Samjists who criticized the manifestation of caste but cherished and defended the system of Varna. Gandhiji was a supporter of the Chaturvarna system in its "pristine purity". This was the basic course of the life long conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhiji.

"I don't want Swaraj", Gandhiji observed" at the cost of depressed classes or any class for that matter. ... In fighting the government the motives of co-workers can be mixed. In fighting the devil of untouchability I have absolutely select company". Why then could not Ambedkar co-operate with Gandhi who proclaimed his belief in the sinfulness of the practice of untouchability and vowed to work for its eradication? The reply is two fold: (i) he differed in his evaluation of the two devils – British rule and untouchability; (ii) he was not prepared to make any distinction between the nature of untouchability and the nature of caste. To him the two were interlinked; without destroying the latter the first could not be completely eradicated. To Babasaheb British rule in India was not the "greatest devil of all". To him the greatest devil was the caste system. Destruction of caste alone could engage all his faculties, not the fight against foreign rule in India.

Ambedkar submitted to the Simon Commission, the "Depressed Classes had helped the British to conquest the country", but the British Government instead of showing any gratitude had conferred the benefit of education on the higher classes and had fully neglected the Depressed Classes for fear of alienating the powerful groups".

Ambedkar never considered that his life mission was the liberation of India from British rule. He held that his mission was the liberation of Depressed classes from the strangle hold of Brahminism and the caste system. By Brahminism he meant the negation of the spirit of equality, liberty and fraternity... This had to be fought. Hence, for him the "devil of all devils" was upper
caste rule, the philosophy of Brahminism and the caste system, as its embodiment. He argued that the retention of the caste system spelled ruin of India and that was caste which had reduced India to slavery. On the contrary Gandhi said, "In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration". He went on to defend the fourfold division of Hindu Society as "Fundamental natural and essential".

However, in brief, Gandhiji after listening mighty ideas of Ambedkar abandoned his long held position relating to caste and varnas a testimony to Babasaheb's foresight and courage. Gandhiji said "the whole world is moving – it never stands still; I will be making a wrong statement if I say that I am today what I was yesterday and will remain the same in future. In fact, I should not even have such a desire". Thus on the question of annihilation of caste Dr. Ambedkar has succeeded in converting Gandhiji to his point of view. Whether Gandhi acknowledged this or not is another matter, nor is it all that important. But those who can view things in perspective should have no hesitation in accepting the tree position.

To sum up the Government's documents of the mid 20's described Babasaheb as a "very literary man", a person of "influence". Though he remained haunted by the fear of Maratha domination, his arguments were rational and not sentimental. In fact, his economic and constitutional philosophy was closer to that of Nehru. He was no friend to capitalism. He did not love bourgeois values. He was also opposed to the communist philosophy and didn't subscribe to the doctrine of proletarian dictatorship. His differences with the communists were fundamental but he could form an alliance with the socialists.

Dr. Ambedkar was an original thinker. He had thought deeply over India's political and economic problems and was closer to Lohia in his thinking on the issue of caste. Through he was not subscribed to the Marxist philosophy, but he was mindful of its attraction for the oppressed. He was at one time with Gandhiji in holding that religion was necessary. But he did not agree that he should continue to stick to his ancestral religion even if he found it repugnant to his notions of a three religions. Finally, Dr. Ambedkar awakened the downtrodden and made them fight for their just rights.

References
[8] Ibid. 16.
[9] Ibid. 18.
[10] Ibid. 20.
[14] Ibid., 45
[15] Ibid., 46
[16] Ibid., 46
[17] Ibid., 47
[20] Ibid, 47