

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION WITH A BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of Indian Constitution, was the victim of Indian caste system. He belongs to Mahar Community which was regarded as untouchable in Maharashtra. It became a matter of history that the architect of Indian constitution had been the victim of untouchability. It was not only Ambedkar, millions of Indian people born in low caste were humiliated and treated as untouchables. They were not allowed to enjoy social, political and economic rights. They were not treated as humans. Indian caste system had a prolonged historical and religious upbringing. The historical root of Indian caste system lie submerged in Hindu religion. Hindu religion admits varna system. There are four varnas, such as, Brahmin, Khatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Although a shudra even possesses admirable qualities and superior to other higher caste in terms of quality, but still he has been regarded as untouchable simply because he was born in a shudra family. Ambedkar was against this birth oriented caste system. He claimed that all men are equal as humans and every human has the right to enjoy liberty, equality and fraternity. It is injustice to deprive one from human rights simply for the reason that he or she belongs to lower caste. The superiority or inferiority of men should be evaluated in terms of qualities but not in terms of the caste in which he belongs to. From historical perspective, it can be said that the *varnavyavastha* of Hindu religion actually weakened the national unity and integrity.

Ambedkar's life and vision continue to attract scholars; reviewers and commentators have attempted to understand his social theories on the issues of casteism. A major work *Analysing*

and Fighting Caste: Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability by Christophe Jaffrelot in 2005 attempts to re-assess Ambedkar's opposition to Hinduism and advocates Buddhism. Gail Omvedt's study, entitled *Understanding Caste: from Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*(2011) approached the historical issue of caste and anti- caste movements and fights the oppressive facets of Hinduism and its possible resistance by challenging the graded hierarchies of caste. He claims that Hindus are Indian and Hinduism is the religion of the people of India. Although Hinduism maintained a fair continuity in its pluralism, it has given birth to uncontrolled and untenable social inequalities. According to the author, the great virtue of Hinduism was its generous tolerance of other faiths. Here it is worthy to note that the majority of other faiths have taken a position against communalism but not against Hinduism. This secular version of opposition envisages the view that the Indians must come together beyond religious identities. Thus, what they want is common identity, i.e., as citizens of a nation and as human beings, not otherwise. Here Omvedt explains and examines the Brahmanic Hinduism and the logic of Dalit politics and Dalit vision from his own rationale.

Gail Omvedt, in his *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (2003) nicely outlines Buddhism from an Ambedkarite point of view. In short, Gail's contribution covers Buddhism and its background, philosophy, the types and forms the society from Theravada to Mahayana and Vajrayana to navyana Buddhism and so on. A meaningful and informed analysis of Hindutva and hegemonic position of Hinduism is attempted in *Dalit Visions* (2014) by Gail Omvedt. It also confronts the visions and ideology of Brahmanic Hinduism while dealing with the ways of Dalit Movement.

It would not be an exaggeration if we claim after Ambedkar that his the concept of Humanism deserves worthy of philosophical consideration because humanism is a great virtue of man.

Ambedkar was a great humanist. In his *Concept of Humanism of Dr. Ambedkar* (2005), I. S. Vidyasagar beautifully narrated Ambedkar's concept of Humanism. Truly speaking, the present society that has been marked by vices like hatred, jealousy, anger, domination, exploitation, discrimination, injustice etc., required human values are love, affection, compassion, equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, welfare, etc., for all men and women in every sphere of life. Otherwise, the concept of humanism does not bear any sense. Ambedkar since his early life rose to the occasion with the message of humanism, containing the human values like love, compassion, and so on. Ambedkar thus should be treated as the proponent of modern humanism. The author also thinks that the 20th century has been marked as the age of deteriorating human values and as a result, study of humanism and concern for social equality of men and women is essential to address. Discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, and gender is the hallmark of the society. In fact all social evils, such as, crimes and sin are committed in the name of caste, gender and colour. As a result, it becomes serious obstacle in the way of political stability, economic development and social solidarity. In the context of social debacles, Ambedkar's concept of humanism has paramount relevance.

According to Vidyasagar, the life Sketch of Dr. Ambedkar, i.e., the biography of Dr. Ambedkar would reflect the humanistic propensity of the humanists. In this context, the author started with the sequel about the birth place of Ambedkar, the family status of him. The author also mentioned the brilliant educational and intellectual background of Ambedkar. Ambedkar was an eminent economist, eminent lawyer, constitutional architect and expert, an able and efficient administrator, a gifted orator and effective parliamentarian, a great educationist, a great patriot, a dedicated democrat, a creator of social justice, a creative writer, successful and powerful journalist, a militant champion of the untouchables, a daring social reformer, great political and

party maker, a great editor, an eminent professor, great social, political philosopher and above all a great humanists. Dr. Ambedkar was greatly influenced with the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The author claims that from his sheer humanistic perspective, Dr. Ambedkar wanted to give all citizens the right to equality in religious. Economic and political matters with the perception that they may get opportunity to better their lives. In order to get this opportunity the structure of the society has to be changed. Without changing the existing structure of the society nothing can be done for the betterment of the society. In this regard, one has to know about his life and work in brief. In the remaining part of this sequel the author elaborately and systematically enlightened Ambedkar's biography and the splendid work he did during his life. The author shocked to know about the inhumanly suffering imposed on Ambedkar simply on the ground that he was born in Mohar community and hence be treated as untouchable.

The author reflects on how Ambedkar wanted to organise the untouchables under one established an organisation the Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha, on 20th July, 1924. It addresses education, culture, economic condition and the sentiments of the depressed classes. The author recognised 1927 as the historic year to Ambedkar because in this year Ambedkar launched the civil rights movement at Mahad, a small town in Bombay presidency. This movement was intended to exercise equal rights for the untouchables to take drinking water from the chowder tank. The author thinks this movement inevitable because of the hostility of the Mahad caste Hindus. In this meeting Ambedkar became the acknowledged leader of untouchables and it was a very important landmark in Ambedkar's carrier *as a social reformer*. As a social reformer Ambedkar believes in the democratic, constitutional and peaceful methods of agitation. For Ambedkar, no country is good enough to rule over another, because no class is good enough to rule over another class. The satyagrah movement is going to prove whether Hindu mind treats human

beings like human beings to change the hearts of the Hindus. Thus, the movement will decide whether Hindu mind regards humanity in the new age. The author also reflects on Ambedkar's vision of acquiring political power. We ourselves cannot remove our grievances unless we get political power in our hands. It is only in swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political without which there is no salvation for us. He also pleaded for the right to equality for his fellow beings and adequate representation in the Legislature and the right to elect their own men as their representatives by separate electorates was also demanded and so was adequate representation in the service.

For Ambedkar, equality of treatment, status and opportunities will be guaranteed to you unreservedly. About himself he declared that he was born a Hindu which was not out of his power but it was in his power to die not as a Hindu. This clearly reflects the aversion Ambedkar showed towards Hinduism according to the author. According to the author, Ambedkar never believed *in opposition for the sake of opposition*. He always spoke with authority and his speeches enlivened the debates and enlightened the members. Here it is interesting to note that on 24th May, 1956, he declared at Bombay that he would embrace Buddhism on 23rd September, 1956. According to his press note on 14th October, 1956, Ambedkar with his second wife Savita and the five lakhs of people renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism at Nagpur. When he went to Katmandu in November 1956 to participate in the world Buddhist conference he was hailed as **Navabuddha**. D. C. Adhir claimed that due to Ambedkar's influence as the architect of Indian constitution, the Ashoke Chakra was put on the flag of India and the lion from the Ashoka Pillar at Sarnath were adopted as the National Emblem. The question naturally arises: if Hinduism as a religion fails to ensure equality among the people and Ambedkar knew it from the last thirty years, then why did he wait for a long to embrace Buddhism? In this regard, the author

replied that Ambedkar clearly loved all that was best in Hinduism. We think initially Ambedkar tried his level best to reformulate Hinduism and eventually when he came to know that it would not possible, he then shifted from Hinduism to Buddhism. The author following Ambedkar finds out three different ways between Hinduism and Buddhism. These are: Iswar (god), Atman (soul) and Varna system. In Buddhism there is no Iswar, soul and caste or varna system. For Ambedkar, social and human reconstruction needed a religious basis and in this regard he preferred Buddhism instead of Hinduism. Buddhism affords hope to the downtrodden; it is a part and parcel of Bhartiya Culture. In this context, the author claims that the conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land. Ambedkar felt that religion alone can establish equality among human beings and that dharma is important for man and humanity. Buddhist dharma was more democratic, ethical and equalitarian. His understanding of dharma is not personal but social. Dharma is righteous relations between man and man in all spheres of life. Buddhist way of life aimed at the moral regeneration and social emancipation of all human beings.

Even the author outlined the concept of humanism is as old as human society and the ideal of humanism has been cherished by men throughout the history of mankind. According to the author, humanism asserts that man is the only reality and there is nothing else besides. It tries to emancipate man from orthodoxy and dogmatism. Humanism stands for the values like happiness, love, kindness, compassion, tolerance, pleasure, freedom, and removal of fanaticism, rigorism, intolerance, feudalism, despotism, egoism and self-aggrandisement. Thus, the author then develops Ambedkar's concept of humanism as he thinks that Ambedkar will remain a source of inspiration to men and women all over the world because of his social humanitarian vision. As the founder of scientific and social humanitarian, Ambedkar absolutely refused the

existence of God, permanent soul and its transmigration and other metaphysical maxims. His philosophical approach, the author reveals, was quite scientific, rational and humanistic. He felt that all kinds of exploitations on Shudras and others are due to Brahmanism and it should be rooted out to save and to revive humanity in India. Buddhism is the only solution for all evils. Ambedkar's concept of humanism stands for liberty, equality and fraternity of all human beings. He stood for a social relation based on right relations between man and woman in all spheres of life. His humanism alternatively known as social justice is directly associated with his concept of religion and morality. Ambedkar was not against religion, he was a religious person but his understanding of religion was directed to the benefits to society. Religion is truth and it must ensure equality and treat all believers as equal. His religion did not approve any type of hypocrisy, injustice and exploitation of man by man in the name of religion. He stood for a religion which is based on universal principles of morality and ensures the three principles of justice, such as, liberty, equality and fraternity. He considered the caste system as the greatest evil of Hindu religion, the varna system is the root cause of all inequality. He emphasised more on the liberation of the oppressed classes. He wanted the downtrodden classes to educate, organise, and agitate to elevate their position as respectable citizens of the country. Ambedkar accepted that education gives birth to the reason, the feeling of unity, brotherhood and love of country. Education gives manhood to man. Man without proper education is just like an animal. Thus, he finds human values in education. Education which does not create liberty, equality and morality is not education. Education must appear as the safeguard of humanity. In short, Ambedkar was a champion of socialism who championed the cause of women. His humanistic attitude made him recognise himself as a **universal man**. Thus, the author pointed out Ambedkar's rational and humanistic awareness towards developing the fate of the oppressed and

downtrodden people. As a proponent of the trio-principle of social justice, such as, liberty, equality and fraternity, Ambedkar's contribution for the betterment of women is unique. He not only wanted to ensure social equality between man and woman but also equal status and dignity between man and women. According to Ambedkar, women do not enjoy freedom of the will in Hinduism, but in allowing women to become Bhikkunis (nuns) the Buddha not only opened for them the way to liberty, he also allowed them to acquire dignity, independent of sex. Thus, the effort of the Lord Buddha was the beginning of the revolution and liberation of women in India. According to Ambedkar, Manu was responsible for the downfall of the women. In the opinion of Manu, women are not to be free under any circumstances. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments they must be kept under ones control. These are only few among many instances cited by Manu through which women were degraded.

In the past attempts had been made by many social reformists, such as, Raja Ram Mohan, Mahatma Gandhi, and others to uplift women. Even Plato in his book *Republic* was vocal about women's emancipation. Having said this, the author thinks that Ambedkar's vision and mission about women's emancipation is unique in nature. As a true humanist, Ambedkar was one of the reformers who championed the cause of women including the issues of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He was a great believer of women's organisations. Here it is true to say that Ambedkar accorded equal status to women and men in every sphere and also warned the women against the misuse of their rights. Therefore, the author regards that it would be appropriate to regard Ambedkar as a humanist and as one of the saviors of the Indian women.

A number of good works on Ambedkar, like Vidyasagar, mainly focuses on the essentials of social integrity with reference to Ambedkar. The ideal to be realised according to Ambedkar is of

one man one value in all walks of life, political, economic and social. The ideal of one man one value is to be achieved by stopping religious, economic and social exploitation of man by man. Thus, absence of exploitation in any form is an essence of socialism. According to scholars, Ambedkar socialism does not only embrace economic equality but also social and political equality. As by birth Ambedkar was an untouchable, he had to undergo the sufferings and humiliations due to the untouchability. The untouchables were not allowed to take water from the well, to enter schools, to travel in buses, to travel in the same railway compartment, to wear jewelry, to put tiles on the roof of the houses, to own land, to keep cattle, to sit when a Hindu is standing. Thus, all the human rights were denied to the untouchables. The human rights include the right to education, the right to choose one's own marriage, the right to vote and hold public office, and the right to receive equal pay for equal work. All these rights were denied to the untouchables. Untouchables did not enjoy their freedom. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation rather it permits exploitation without obligation. This is the reason why scholars are mentioning Ambedkar's view of socialism as the mark of humanism.

We think that Ambedkar's humanism was against that religion which teaches one man to hate another. Humanistic religion teaches the lesson of equality and brotherhood. Like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, the Hindu religion did not accept the principle of equality and brotherhood in general behaviour. Thus, Hindu religion is destructive to humanity. Ambedkar's socialism is another important dimension of his humanism. It is also the major contribution to the philosophy of economics or socialism. Ambedkar's socialism does not only embrace economic equality but also social and political equality. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that there have been no ends to the studies published in journals on the alternatives suggested by this champion of Dalit rights. With the help and use of these insights, my thesis, elaborates how they may be

connected to historical, economical contexts and how they may be related to philosophical discourses. In my thesis, the ethics of social and religious justice etc. are explored in greater detail and considerable attention is paid to find their relevance in our times and contemporary Indian society.
