CHAPTER VI
SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF AMBEDKAR

Ambedkar had a very sound perception on the structure and patterns of Society in India. Forces operating at different levels of Indian Society come in for close scrutiny by him, a very good deal of social practices prevailing in India were found to be repugnant or inconsistent with fundamental values of civilized human existence by Ambedkar. He, hence, ardently criticized archaic social practices and championed the cause of social reform and transformation both through struggles and agitations, and also through the device of the machinery of the state. Social engineering through the medium of state and legal apparatuses was a strong component of Ambedkar's social philosophy. To him, 'Chathurvarna' was the main blot on Hinduism, it never allowed a vast majority to make their contributions to the advancement of social cause. Four cardinal points were stressed by Ambedkar in studying the caste problem; they are: one, in spite
of the composite make up of the Hindu population there was a deep cultural unity, two, caste was a parceling into bits of a larger cultural unit, three, there was only one caste to start with and four, classes had become castes through initiations (or imitation) and ex-communication. In his concern about the degraded system of hindu society he observed that, “the Hindu Society must be re-organized on a religious basis which would recognize the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity” 1. He criticized the inherent indignities in the Varna system and caste practices. His reaction to the degraded Varna system was, “Caste has ruined Hindus; reorganization of Hindu Society on the basis of Chathurvarna is impossible because the Varnavyavastha is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. It is incapable of sustaining itself by its own virtue and has an inherent tendency to degenerate caste system unless there is a legal sanction behind it which can be enforced against every one trespassing his varna” 2.

2 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., ibid., p-114.
The evil social practices draw their substance and intellectual and philosophical sources from the scriptures and shastras. This is amply made clear by Ambedkar in his remark that, “The sanctity of Caste and Varna can be destroyed only by disregarding the divine authority of the Shastras”\(^3\). Ambedkar explains degradation brought into the Hindu social order by caste system in the following words, "Caste is no doubt primarily the breath of the Hindus. But the Hindus have fouled the air all over and everybody is infected, Sikh, Muslim and Christian\(^4\). He chose a reformist approach, both from within and without, to solve the problems associated with multiple caste divisions and their mutual incompatibility. Even though caste (system) was found to be dysfunctional and disintegrative in nature Ambedkar did not endorse social exclusion by the depressed classes from Hindu society. An assertion for civil right by the untouchables and acceptance by all of these rights was his proclaimed stand.

3 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., *op.cit.*, p-144.
4 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., *ibid.*, p-133.
Rightly he observes that caste has killed the public spirit, it destroyed public charity, it made public opinion impossible, in Indian society virtue has become caste ridden and 'morality has become caste-bound'. The basic principles underlying 'Varna' and 'Caste' were clearly distinguished by him, they are diametrically opposed too. 'Varna' is based on the worth of the individual and caste is based on birth, the former is ideal whereas the latter is repugnant to humanity. Three programmes were suggested, thus, for the abolition of caste system: (a) abolition of sub-caste (b) intercaste dining and (c) intercaste marriage, the first two were found to be only of limited utility and the last one as the most effective. He found the destructing of caste system very difficult, for even though physical, spatial exclusivity is a part of it, caste is not a physical phenomenon alone. Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind, change of caste feeling, hence, involves a notional change. Analyzing the class caste structure of Indian social order, especially in the rural areas Ambedkar comments that. 'The Brahmins enslaved the mind, and the Bania enslaved the body, between them they divided the spoils which belonged to
the governing classes\textsuperscript{5}. Hence, he was vehement in his attitude toward the caste structure of society and consequent evil of untouchability. Tracing its origin he observed that, "... The Brahmins on the other hand disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them contempt and hatred with the result that the Broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables\textsuperscript{6}.

Describing caste as an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt, held it responsible for the perpetuation of a social system of graded inequality. Ambedkar described such a social order as amoral and amorphous, stratified both structurally and functionally it was held to be de-humanizing in effect, this necessitated a radical change from the base to roof

\textsuperscript{5} Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables" – Thacker Publishing Company Ltd., 1945, Bombay, p-217.

of this social order. He observes that, “Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism. You will succeed in saving Hinduism if you will kill Brahminism” 7. In open public practice caste system and untouchability are sustained by a value frame that originate and thrive in the family environ. This self-perpetuating stratification into sub-caste and further sub-division caused sub-caste consciousness and exclusivity. Here, Ambedkar questioned the value frame on which this exploitative de-humanizing system survived and stressed the need for a counter ideology that challenged the congenital, immobile, rigid, hierarchical structuring of human beings. Aptly he expressed as follows, “it is said that the Varna system is the foundation of Hindu religion. This is acceptable to me. I do not accept that Hindus outside the four varmas are untouchables. There are Hindus who do not accept the authority of the Vedas. I do not accept any book except the Bhagavad Gita to be worthy of respect or as an authority. Though I do not accept the authority of Vedas, I consider myself to be a

sanatan Hindu. About the organization of Hindu society group exclusivism was his main reservation, he criticized Hindu social order as an amalgam of mutually exclusive groups that stood in hierarchical relationship devoid of a unified character and cohesiveness. The fragmenting of society by groups was found to be self-defeating by Ambedkar. Groups in themselves were not to be condemned but the impact of isolation caused by them and consequent atomization invited his criticism. This isolation produces a kind of anti social orientation defeating the very purpose of social life. Hierarchization of social space resulted in the flexible Varna system becoming a rigid category. He held that the Aryans were one cultural whole, and the vivisecting of what was a whole resulted in the Varna - Jati system, this was made easy by superimposition of endogamy over exogamy by the priestly Brahmins who were also the codifiers and interpreters of scriptural canons.

Ambedkar clearly perceived the active role expected of the state system in ending the stratified social gradation, and he pointed at the inability of the British colonial state in India to redeem the oppressed classes. For, the bureaucratic imperial government remained ignorant about the living forces in Indian society and also it feared reactions from rival corners if the depressed classes were given their due share. Also, the depressed sections, excluded from the military services of the native rulers, were absorbed by the East India Company to strengthen its military base and overpower the native political units, once this was achieved the imperial dispensation colluded with the forward, educated section to consolidate its possession and the depressed were again subjugated and neglected. Thus, the depressed classes remained depressed ones before, during and after British rule in India. The colonial establishment in India was equally exploitative and negligent of the depressed in effect.

The 'smrthi' tradition, especially 'Manusmrti' was held to be responsible for parceling society into four-fold division of
castes and the creation of the 'Panchamas'. Hence, in the psychological and social sense of the term Indians never constituted a nation. Castes are anti-national and they bring in separation in social life. Caste division further sub-divided was responsible for the creation of several thousand sub-castes that prevented the growth of feeling of national spirit in India. To Ambedkar, "A society is not to be condemned as a body because there are groups in it. It is to be condemned if the groups are isolated, each leading an isolated life of its own. Because it is this isolation which produces the anti-social spirit which makes co-operative effort so impossible of achievement." Caste system, in turn, makes political power the monopoly of a few causing betterment of the downtrodden impossible. A good number, thus, becomes tired of being governed and assert impatiently to govern

themselves. If this is not overcome through drastic socio-political reformative measures class struggle leading to class war is bound to occur. For, in society power equations are determined by the variable elements of property, religion, social status etc. and every society has its own uniqueness in different periods and different stages of its progress and development, hence, in India the socio-religious aspects are to be treated as crucial variables that determine the power equations in an iniquitous manner, to Ambedkar and he held that, "... Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity".10

A full comprehension of the socio-religious changes that occurred on the societal plane can be seen in the approach of Ambedkar. The degrading of the Vedic religion into segregated caste hierarchy of Brahminism and reactive birth of Buddhism challenging the vertical ordering of castes and classes is well

explained by him. Rise of *Vaishnavaism* and *Saivaism* emaciated Buddhism and the onslaught by Muslim invasion, especially by Alla-ud-din Khalji put an end to the prospects of Buddhism, making another revival impossible. He found Muslim invasions as the main reason for the termination of Buddhism in India.

Elasticity of Buddhism and its social philosophy attracted Ambedkar. He says that, “Now what is the basis of Buddhism? If you study carefully, you will see that Buddhism is based on reason. There is an element of flexibility inherent in it which is not to be found in any other religion” 11. At the same time he well appreciated Hindu culture and heritage, for he observes that, “if the depressed classes join Islam or Christianity they not only go out of the Hindu religion but they also go out of the Hindu culture” 12. Islam and Christianity did not attract Ambedkar.


because he found they too afflicted by caste evils. To him, "there can thus be no manner of doubt that the Muslim society in India is afflicted by the same evils as afflict the Hindu society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the evils of the Hindus and something more. That something more is the compulsory system of purdah for Muslim women". 

Attaching more importance to religion and spiritual life, than to the material dimensions, he held that India would require Buddhism to guard her freedom and spiritual strength. A vivisection of the social system that sought its legitimacy from the Hindu religion was the main concern for Ambedkar, rather than establishing the merits and demerits of Hindu religion. In his studied opinion, "Hindu society seems to me to stand in need of moral regeneration which is dangerous to postpone. And the question is who can determine and control this moral regeneration?, obviously only those who have undergone an intellectual regeneration and those who are honest enough to

have the courage of their conviction born of intellectual emancipation." Along with this he makes known his preference for Buddhism thus, "I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. Buddhism preaches 'Prajna'(understanding) as against superstition and super naturalism, 'Karuna' (love) and 'Samata'(equality). That is what man wants for good and happy life." It was in this spirit that he asked the depressed classes to leave the de-humanizing Hindu religious order and opt for Buddhism. Exhorting the deprived to effect a change of faith, from the one that denied their respect, honor, money, food and shelter. Ambedkar addressed them as, "I tell you, religion is for man not man for religion. If you want to organize, consolidate and be successful in this world, change this religion. The religion that does not recognize you as


human beings or give you water to drink, or allow you to enter the temples is not worthy to be called a religion". {16}

The center of religion was held to be, in Ambedkar's approach, between man and man, not between man and God alone. While arguing against priest craft he held Hindutva a joint product of touchables and untouchables. His tone was primarily reformative in nature, he explained that, "The Hindu society should be reorganized on two main principles of equality and absence of casteism". {17} Religion was held to be an integral agent of social change and he found enough of potential in Buddhism for that change. Since only religion could be used to reform society he opposed anything that denied or diminished the role of religion. That is the reason why he emphasized the need for both religion and society to be humane to their basic core. This is expressed

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17. Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., ibid, p-100.
by him in the following manner, "the most important point we want to emphasize is not the satisfaction that you get from the worship of the image of God, but the plain fact that a temple is not defiled by the presence of an untouchable, nor is the purity of the image affected by it. That is why we oppose the idea of separate temples for us and insist on entering the existing ones." 18. Stressing the need for reforms from within and to base it in the integrative frame he explains that, "Hindutva belongs as much to the untouchable Hindus as to the touchable Hindus. . . . The temples built in the name of Hindutva, the growth and prosperity of which was achieved gradually with the sacrifice of touchable and untouchable Hindus, must be open to all the Hindus irrespective of caste." 19.

Untouchability was found to be a permanent feature of Hindu society by Ambedkar. An untouchable is born impure, lives impure and dies impure, a high caste polluted and defiled by the

18 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., opp.cit., p-95
19 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., ibid., p-96.
'untouchable' can be made pure through purification process, but there is no process for purifying the untouchable. Untouchability displays territorial segregation, untouchable is, both socially and territorially in a tight spot. He depicted untouchability as a grave symptom and the disease was moral decay of society and religious perversity, the very notion of 'untouchability' was held to be irrational and more irrational is the attempts to reform or perfect the so called untouchable, reformation and perfection are needed at some other levels. He cryptically observes that, "everyone who feels moved by the deplorable conditions of untouchables begins by saying: 'we must do something for the untouchables'. One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying: 'Let us do something to change the Hindu'. It is inevitably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the untouchable as though untouchability was due to his depravity". It was the wrong diagnosis and erroneous prescription of social...
problems that attracted criticism from Ambedkar, he wanted a change of mind on the part of caste Hindu, not on the part of depraved. Perverse socialization was the main bane of the untouchables and he wanted them to assert for their social and political rights. He exhorts them as, "... As a matter of fact, it is your birthright to get food, shelter and clothing in equal proportion with every individual, higher or low. If you believe in living a respectable life you should believe in self help which is best help." Untouchability as a social institution was a later entrant to Hindu order and it is based purely on political and religious grounds. Ambedkar called untouchables as 'Broken Men' who are 'watch and ward of villages' a job for which they received food, shelter and maintenance from the 'touchables' as a matter of right. Occupational factors were not the originating point for the practice of untouchability, revival of Brahminism and assertion by the priestly Brahmin to degrade Buddhism were the reason for the

growth of untouchability. Ambedkar argues that, "it is wrong to say that the problem of the untouchables is a social problem. For, it is quite unlike the problems of dowry, widow re-marriage, age of consent, etc. which are illustrations of what are called social problems. Essentially, it is a problem of quite a different nature... the problem of the untouchables is fundamentally a political problem... of minority versus majority groups. Untouchability was not merely a religious system, but an economic system, which is worse than slavery. Criticizing social reformers, especially Gandhi, Ambedkar opines that, "Mahatmas have come, and Mahatmas have gone. But untouchables have remained untouchables." Stressing the need for associating change with awareness he pleaded for educating the depressed masses about their plight. The intransigence of caste hindus made Ambedkar proclaim that the socially segregated must be politically


segregated also, and added that, "untouchables were a separate element in the national life of India"  

24. Rejuvenating the social order by completely washing off the evil practice of social exclusion in the form of untouchability was a fundamental equation in his approach to social uplift, he says that, "To clean the unclean, to raise the fallen, and to elevate the untouchable to a status of social equality was the real meaning of culture"  

25. Finding that social mobility and cohesion was at discount as a result of caste untouchability, Ambedkar pressed for urgent steps to demolish it, in his words, "The outcaste is a by product of caste system. There will be untouchables so long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcasts except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of Hindu faith of

24 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., 'What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables' - 1946, Thacker and Company, Bombay, p-88.  

this odious and vicious dogma" 26. Since untouchability and caste system go hand in hand, one cannot be abolished without touching the other. Disappearance of caste is a condition precedent to the disappearance of untouchability, he says thus, "to the Hindu caste is sacred and caste is eternal. If caste cannot vanish what hope is there for untouchability to disappear" 27. For this he wanted the rules of religion to be fully undone, reordered through the law of the state, all social exclusion to be prohibited by the provisions of the Constitution. This is so because a legislative state and static society cannot co-exist, social legislation is the only sure remedy for social immobility and proper effective mobilization in a democratic order.

Ambedkar did not accept conversion of religious faith as a remedy for social maladies. In converting himself out of Hinduism

he was indecisive about the new faith to be followed, whether to Sikkism or Buddhism was his dilemma. Conversion to Islam was, any way, not his choice, for it will denationalize the untouchables, also it will cause the number of Muslims double in India resulting in the menace of Muslim domination. He even wanted the deprived classes in Pakistan to come over to India instead of remaining enslaved there. He categorically told them that, "I would like to tell the scheduled castes who happen to day to be impounded inside Pakistan to come over to India by such means as may be available to them. The second thing I want to say is that it would be fatal for the scheduled castes, whether in Pakistan or in Hyderabad, to put their faith in Muslims or Muslim League. It has become a habit with the scheduled castes to look upon the Muslims as their friends simply because they dislike the Hindus. This is a mistaken view". To him the untouchables joining Christianity will strengthen the British power in India further,

denationalizing the deprived it will detach them away from their
culture. in his view, “if the depressed classes join Islam or
Christianity they not only go out of the Hindu religion but they also
go out of the Hindu Culture” 29. Religious conversion was held to
be an individualistic act and a short-cut method in social action.
On his decision to leave Hindu fold he asserted as, “I will choose
only the least harmful way for the country. And that is the greatest
benefit I am conferring on the country by embracing Buddhism, for
Buddhism is a part and parcel of Bharatiya culture. I have taken
care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture
and history of this land” 30. In the true spirit of a reformer he was
seized up of the true gravity of the problem of social oppression
and found concrete solutions of lasting results the requisite need.

29. Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., Quoted in 'Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar a Crusader',
Makwana, Yogendra, in 'Ambedkar and Social Justice' (Ed),
Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,

30 Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., Quoted in Keer, Dhananjay, 'Dr.Ambedkar : Life
A proper measure of socialization through education was more preferable in his scheme. He makes this clear in these words as, 'I firmly believe in the efficacy of education as a panacea for our social evils. The problem of lower order in this country is not only economic but also cultural . . . I am convinced that nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education'\(^{31}\). Truly promoting this equation, in the process of suggested reforms, Ambedkar advised the depressed classes to acquire three things to emancipate themselves, money power, manpower and intellectual power. In the reformative model suggested by him force or compulsion had little space, the stress was on proper education of the individual and make him or the group pursue the goals of change and social integration from his or their own free will, not being imposed from outside. Nor was a state system determining and controlling the whole social process through domineering legal matters and constitution was the prescription in

his scheme. Aply he observed in the Constituent Assembly thus,
"we are having this liberty in order to reform of our social system,
which is so full of inequalities, discrimination and other things
which conflict with our fundamental rights."\(^{32}\)

A dynamic view of society and social process was the
special trait of the approach adopted by Ambedkar. Promotion of
humane values and social cohesiveness based on matured levels
of interactions and mutuality breathed through the modalities
suggested for socio-religious restructuring. Social organism was
expected to sustain and grow with an inbuilt balance without
disturbing the variegated structures and functional details. To
quote him, "an ideal society should be mobile, should be full of
channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other
parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests
consciously communicated and shared. In other words, there

\(^{32}\) Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., Constituent Assembly Debates. Official Report,
must be social endosmosis" 33. It is pertinent to note that Ambedkar, wanted to undo the discrimination meted out to the depressed classes, not by segregation methods, but by effecting structural changes in the socio-political apparatuses. Here, without opposing the tenets of nationalism against the British imperial order, he opposed the thrust of the national movement that demanded 'self government', for he feared it fostering rule over the already depressed by the high caste elite. The visualized programme was to place the untouchables as a third force between Hindus and Muslims and also between the nationalist movement and British state. It was a clear and clever attempt at political empowerment of the hitherto excluded segments, which he thought the proper solution for socio-cultural backwardness. In this context he held that, "unless the Indian people secure political power and this political power concentrates in the hands of the socially suppressed section of the Indian society, it is not possible

to completely wipe out all social, legal and cultural disabilities, from which this section suffers."  

Social harmony and unity formed the foremost aspects of his notion on society and related issues; socio-cultural solidarity of the nation was of prime concern for him. With this aim he codified the Hindu Code Bill and humanized the laws to mitigate the grievances of women and children, he made the Hindu Code Bill so comprehensive by making it applicable to Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and also to Hindu sects like Virasaivas or Lingayats and members of Aryasamaj and Bhramasamaj. A sincere concern for the nation, societal unity and for Hinduism in general constituted the core of his approach as a social harmoniser. To him, "that the cause which the Depressed classes were determined to espouse was not only human and for their own good but also national, it was a great contribution to Hinduism itself." Promoting


socio-religious cohesion was the most acceptable method. To Ambedkar, in the realm of social action and reconstruction, he opposed the dividing of society for creating cleavages on caste lines, he stated thus, "the touchable and untouchable cannot be held together by law, certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorate for separate electorate. The only thing that can hold them together is love" 36. He sought social transformation through democratic and peaceful means; he did not desire a violent overthrow. Blending idealism and pragmatism the fine way, he did not endorse the blunt destroying of the social order however iniquitous it is, an integrated social order was his aim that will be conducive for the flourish of democracy. He sought to solve the problem of social disharmony and disintegration through peaceful rehabilitation of the downtrodden. In this context he proclaimed that, "those who want to conserve must be ready to repair and all I want is that if you want to maintain the Hindu system, the Hindu culture, the Hindu society,

do not hesitate to repair where it is necessary. This Bill asks for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu society which have almost become dilapidated" 37. A social order in which the inviolability of the individual forms the core and supplemented by the undiluted prevalence of liberty, equality and fraternity was his visualization. He held that, "... once the sacredness of human personality is admitted the necessity of liberty, equality and fraternity must also be admitted as the proper climate for the development of human personality" 38. Relating this to the 'Brahma' concept he further elaborates the democratic scope of an orderly social change and integration which will ever sustain liberty and equality on a fraternal note, he explains as, "... if all persons are parts of Brahma then all are equal and all must enjoy


the same liberty which is what democracy mean. Looked from this point of view Brahma may be unknowable. But there cannot be slightest doubt that no doctrine could furnish a stronger foundation for Democracy than the doctrine of Brahma” 39.

In spite of the projected view of divisions in India, Racial (Arya-Dravida), Caste (Hindu-Harijan) and Communal (Hindu-Muslims), Ambedkar held that India could be one and integrated existence can be attained, he was critical of the colonial policy, of the ‘divide-and-rule’ policy, ‘Divid-et-impera’. Social stability, unity and solidarity were the ideals for him. All these – stability, unity and solidarity – depended upon the best social adjustment among the different social units. Ambedkar, here, observes, that, "stability is wanted but not at the cost of change when change is imperative. Adjustment is wanted but not at the sacrifice of social justice" 40. A total and clear grasp on the part of Ambedkar of

Indian social realities is expressed in the following words by him, “The salvation of the Depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus” 41. He was of firm conviction that law alone cannot regulate the relationship between man and man, and a large moral order is the requirement, moral order shall go beyond utilitarian rationality and rational legal imperatives, this moral is equally required for the sustenance of the social order, as well as for religious purposes. That is why his main commitment was to eradicate caste order, and he explains that, “... As an economic organization caste is therefore, a harmful institution, in as much as it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclination to the exigencies of social rules” 42.


42. Ambedkar, B.R., Dr., 'Anihilation of Caste', Bhimpatrika, Jalandar, 1936 p-75.