

PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, generic, discipline specific, elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the University has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade “A”.

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this, we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed by the teaches, officers & staff of the University, and I heartily congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish you all a grand success.

Professor (Dr.) Ranjan Chakrabarti
Vice-Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University

Under Graduate Degree Programme

Under Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)

Subject: Generic Elective (Political Science)

Course Title: Understanding Ambedkar

Course Code : GE - PS - 41

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Netaji Subhas Open University

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**Netaji Subhas
Open University**

**UG : Political Science
(HPS)**

Course Title: Understanding Ambedkar

Course Code : GE - PS - 41

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Module - 1
Life and Career of Ambedkar

Unit - 1 □ Understanding Ambedkar

Structure

- 1.1 Objective**
- 1.2 Introduction**
- 1.3 Life History**
- 1.4 Ambedkar's Writings**
- 1.5 Ambedkar's Philosophy**
- 1.6 Conclusion**
- 1.7 Summing Up**
- 1.8 Probable Questions**
- 1.9 Further Reading**

1.1 Objective

After going through this unit students will be acquainted with—

- the life and career of Ambedkar
- his sacrifices, struggle and scholarship
- development of his social and political ideals

1.2 Introduction

Babasaheb Ambedkar is one of the prominent thinkers of modern India. He was a scholar, and statesman, leader and liberator and the chief architect of the constitution of India. As a thinker, he was primarily concerned with the issues of freedom, equality, democracy and emancipation of the marginalized section of the society. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru described him as “a symbol of revolt”. Right from his childhood he was a victim of humiliation, stigma and poverty. But depending on the strength of his will he rose to new heights in almost every walk of social life. He was highly critical of the ideas and institutions which enslaved people. He had a vision of a new India,

free from the evils untouchability. He relentlessly worked towards the goal of justice for the untouchable's mainly through political means and developed his own ideas about society and politics of the contemporary India.

He was deeply concerned with the social problems of his day which affect the fate of his community.

1.3 Life History

Ambedkar was born on 14th April, 1891 at Mhow, near Indore. He belonged to the Mahar caste, one of the untouchable castes in the fold of hindu society. His ancestral village is Ambavade in Mandangad Taluk of Ratnagiri district of the erstwhile Bombay province. Mahars are the most brave, intelligent and fighting community. They constituted a part of the Bombay Army of the East India Company.

Ambedkar's family belonged to the devotional Kabir School of thought which urged its followers to be compassionate and benevolent. His father, Ramji Sakpal was the instructor in the local military school. Ramji admired Jotirao Phule for his leading role in bringing about major reforms among the lower castes in Maharashtra. Ambedkar's mother Bhimabai, was pious, gentle, and self-respecting woman.

Ramji was hardworking and religious. He offered prayers to lord every morning and evening. The children had to join in his prayers. To ensure spiritual development of his children he read and recited the great national epics, like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He also sang spiritual songs from the Marathi saint poets like Tukaram. All these helped to develop a taste in his children and provided them with a certain command of the language. Ambedkar derived from his father his indomitable spirit, powerful mental energy and intense interest in the welfare of his society.

Ambedkar began his primary education when he was five years old. During his school days he realized the stigma of untouchability. In the classroom he was not allowed to sit along with the rest of the students. In school he had to drink water only in his hand cup poured by members of the upper castes from above. He was denied the right to learn Sanskrit. Such cruel disabilities and ill-treatment engendered in him a burning hatred for Hinduism. In spite of the intolerable insults inflicted on him he continued his studies. He successfully completed his graduation from Bomabay University and went to do his Masters and Ph.D from Columbia University in U.S.A.

He was influenced by three grand tradition of political thought namely liberal, conservative and radical. The unique feature about him is that he has transcended all these traditions.

After completing his Ph.D at Columbia University Ambedkar returned to serve the administration of Maharaja of Baroda who provided financial support to Ambedkar for higher studies in the U.S.A. But despite having exceptional qualifications he became victim of ill-treatment by his staff and utterly disgusted with the insulting environment he returned to Bombay in November 1917. For some time he was a Professor of Political Economy at the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics. He made a representation before the Southborough Committee pleading for separate representation to the depressed classes. He started Mook Nayak. Leader of the Dumb, a fortnightly paper in Marathi in January, 1920. He played a leading role in the first all-India conference of depressed classes on March, 1920 held at Mangaon, in which Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shri Shahu attended.

He joined the London School of Economics to do his D.SC which he completed in 1922. He was invited to the Bar-at-Law from Grey's Inn in the same year. He began his legal practice in Bombay in 1923 and engaged himself to the task of political mobilization and organization of the untouchables. Realizing the necessity of a central institution to represent the grievances of the depressed classes he founded Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabbha in 1924. In 1927 he was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council. He led the famous Satyagraha at Chowdar tank in Mahad demanding rights of the untouchables to take water from common tank. Manusmriti was condemned as a symbol of inequality, cruelty and injustice from the point of view of the depressed classes and was ceremoniously burnt. He started his fortnightly Marathi paper Bahiskrit Bharat as mouthpiece for the depressed classes and formed two organizations, Samaj Samanta Sangh and Samanta Sainik Dal to bolster the demand for equality of the depressed classes. The fortnightly journal Samata was brought out in 1928. In 1928 he made his deputation before the Simon Commission, enquiring into the issue of constitutional reform in India. He led the famous Satyagraha at Kalram temple in Nasik demanding temple entry to untouchables in 1930.

Ambedkar was a believer in the principle that self-help is the best help. In his struggle against untouchability he put emphasis on self-help, self elevation and self respect among the untouchables. His vision of a new India, his ideals on rights,

democracy and representation in course of time pit him against the Indian National Congress and its undisputed leader M.K. Gandhi. This became evidently clear at the round Table conference in 1931 where Ambedkar demanded separate electorate for the depressed classes. Gandhi vehemently opposed this demand. Gandhi went on a fast unto death against the communal award of 1932, which granted separate electorate to the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar negotiated on behalf of the untouchables and signed the Poona Pact agreeing for the joint electorate with reservation for depressed classes.

He formed the Independent Labour Party in 1936. Contesting 17 seats in the election of 1937 in the Bombay province the party won 15 seats. The second World War and the Muslim League demand for Pakistan brought to the fore new and complex issues in the National movement. Ambedkar founded a new party, the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942. He became a member of the Viceroy's council for a period of five years in the same year.

Ambedkar was elected to the constituent Assembly from Bengal. In the Assembly he made a strong argument for a United India with the Congress and the Muslim League working together. He was appointed as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution and became the law minister in the Nehru cabinet in August 1947. In both these capacities he conceptualized and formulated a framework of a free and egalitarian public life in India with extensive safeguards for the depressed classes.

Ambedkar resigned from the Nehru Cabinet because of disagreement with Nehru on Kashmir, issues of foreign policy and Hindu Code bill. He tried to work out an alternative to the absence of social and economic democracy in India. This quest for an alternative ultimately led him to conversion to Buddhism. He died on 6th December, 1956. He left behind a complex body of thought and a radical agenda for social, economic and cultural reconstruction of India.

1.4 Ambedkar's Writings

Dr. Ambedkar wrote many books. Besides his doctoral dissertation on the Problems of the Rupee (1923) and the Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India (1925), he wrote Annihilation of Caste (1936), Thoughts on Pakistan (1940), What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables, The Untouchables : who were They and why they became Untouchables? (1948), States and Minorities (1947), Thoughts on linguistic States. Buddha and his Dhamma (1957) are the most important.

Apart from these he wrote numerous articles, submitted memoranda, delivered lectures and expressed views on various issues in the journals he published.

1.5 Ambedkar's Philosophy

Ambedkar was not a philosopher in the conventional sense like Plato and Aristotle. However, he developed his own social and political ideals out of a clash between idealism and realism, empiricism and rationalism, naturalism and humanism, individualism and socialism, nationalism and internationalism. He argued that political philosophy has to be related to the real human problems and issues. In a sense his philosophy is an expression of real human affairs and is a sincere attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, materialism and spiritualism. His thought and ideas developed from his experience of the ill-treatment meted out to his community by the caste Hindus. His mission was total emancipation of the depressed classes from the clutches of the privileged caste Hindus. He was influenced by the ideas of John Dewey the pragmatic American and his teacher. The Fabian Edwin R.A. Seligman had considerable impact on his thought. He often quoted conservative British thinker, Edmund Burke; though he can not be branded as conservative. His interpretation of the concept of liberty comes close to T.H. Green.

Ambedkar described himself as a “progressive radical” and at times as a “progressive conservative” depending upon the context of demarcation from liberals. For him freedom is a positive power and capacity of the individual to make independent choice unhindered by economic exploitation, social and religious institutions and practices, and fears and prejudice. He believed that liberal conception of freedom is narrow in the sense that it allows concentration of wealth in a few hands and deprivation and exploitation of the toiling masses. According to him liberalism, while supporting formal equality allowed vast inequalities in the economic, social and cultural spheres. He criticized liberalism for its justification of colonialism. Liberal emphasis on the individual ignored community bonds. He argued that liberal understanding of the state is inadequate. He recognized the critical role of the state. For him, state is a human organization and it has to serve the interests of man.

Man constitutes the central point of his philosophy and man is the central subject and object of his study. He believed that everyman should have an opportunity to live a dignified life; it should be a life of self-respect, justice and equality. He believed that man is not a means to an end but an end in himself. The ultimate purpose of all activity is the good of man. The mission of man's life should be to fight all forms of

tyranny and injustice and to abolish all forms of privileges so that the depressed classes are released from bondage.

According to Ambedkar a sense of similarity and faith in the common unity of purpose among members constitute the basis of society. Society exists by communication. Communication creates like mindedness in a people about their values and their common good. In the absence of shared experiences, emotions and values there cannot be a society in the real sense. This is completely absent in the Hindu society. He argued that the caste system has prevented common activity and in the process has prevented Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. Discriminatory attitude and treatment has promoted disharmony and disunity in the Hindu society. Rigidity of the caste system and absence of the spirit of adjustment made Indian society stationary.

Ambedkar's ideal society is based on liberty, equality and fraternity. It should be dynamic, open with opportunities for communicating and sharing experience. It should have a social conscience in the absence of which there cannot be an ideal society. This social conscience always strives for social justice, peace and progress and stand for upholding the principles of liberty and equality in human relation. Ambedkar sought harmony between man and society as part of his social and political philosophy.

Ambedkar was a great champion of human rights. He sought to build a system of rights for all individuals in the society by law. He believed that every individual possesses certain inalienable rights which are natural and inherent. State exists for the sake of preventing injustice and tyranny through a system of rights. For him right to life, liberty and property are the inherent rights of the individual. These rights have to be recognized by the constitution.

Law constitutes an important component of Ambedkar's political philosophy. For him law creates and promotes peace and justice in society, It is the guardian of liberty and equality. He believed that all citizens are equal before the law and possess equal civil rights. According to him equality means treating people as equals in the entire gamut of social relations they are subject to. He believed that much of inequality is scripted by assigning people to the untouchable groups.

Perusing the cause of equality and justice for the depressed classes, Ambedkar strongly supported democratic principle as the bedrock of justice. According to him democracy is the only defensible mode of public life appropriate for human dignity and equality. Democracy is not merely an institutionalized arrangement but also the only way of life befitting human fulfilment.

Ambedkar was essentially a man of religion. For him man has also a mind. However, he did not believe in the existence of a soul. Secularism is the product of his philosophy of religion. He supported religious tolerance and co-existence of all religions. As a humanist he regarded religion as a means to cater to the needs of men during this life. He was opposed to organized religion and idol worship. There should be no place for fanaticism and irrationalism in religion. Religion should preserve human values of equality, liberty and fraternity. In India where there is multiplicity of religions, secularism is the only way to religious peace. To him secularism is a blend of tolerance, liberty and equality. Ambedkar showed great interest in Marxism in the 1950s. He identified certain key areas on which he was in agreement with Marxism. He argued that the task of philosophy is to transform the world as Marx suggested in his theses on Feuerbach. Other areas of agreement are : conflict between classes, private property as the root of exploitation; and social ownership of the means to build a good society of production. He found that on all these issues Buddha is in agreement with Marx. However, he rejected the inevitability of socialism, the economic interpretation of history which does not acknowledge the crucial role that political and ideological institution play, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the conception of the withering away of the state. He rejected the strategy of violence as a means to seize power and called for resolute mass action to build up a good society. He argued that desirable political order can be created by acknowledging a moral order which he saw explicitly expressed in Buddha's teachings.

1.6 Conclusion

The life of Dr. Ambedkar was the story of the struggle of a champion for human rights. He was a fighter for the dignity of man. He was born in an untouchable family and subjected to inhuman treatment in his childhood and youth. He made his way fighting every step forward. His philosophy was guided by a kind of social dynamism. It was one of solving the problems of the social and political life of mankind. His politics was a politics of emancipation of the millions of untouchables of India. His ideas revolved round the dignity and welfare of man through social and political action. Human rights, secularism, belief in peace and non-violence, constitutional morality, social justice are some of the most enduring elements of his social and political philosophy.

1.7 Summing Up

1. Ambedkar was a scholar, and statesman, leader and liberator and the chief architect of the constitution of India.
2. He was highly critical of the ideas and institutions which enslaved people.
3. Ambedkar's family belonged to the devotional Kabir School of thought which urged its followers to be compassionate and benevolent.
4. He was a fighter for the dignity of man.
5. Ambedkar was essentially a man of religion.
6. Ambedkar was a great champion of human rights.
7. Ambedkar's ideal society is based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

1.8 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Write an essay on the life of Dr. Ambedkar.
2. Comment on the social and political ideas of Ambedkar.
3. Comment on Ambedkar's critique of liberalism.
4. Examine Ambedkar's concept of Secularism.

B. Short Questions :

1. Identify issues of conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi.
2. What were Ambedkar's differences with Marx?

C. Objective Questions (MCQ):

1. In which year was Dr. Ambedkar nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1927 | (b) 1925 |
| (c) 1930 | (d) 1920 |

Ans. (a)

2. In which year did Ambedkar lead a satyagraha at Kalram temple?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1920 (b) 1925
(c) 1930 (d) 1935

Ans. (c)

3. From which province was Ambedkar elected to the Constituent Assembly

Answer Options:

- (a) Bengal (b) United Province
(c) Gujarat (d) Maharashtra

Ans. (a)

4. Which religion was Ambedkar converted to?

Answer Options:

- (a) Christianity (b) Islamism
(c) Sikhism (d) Buddhism

Ans. (d)

5. Which of the following book was authored by Ambedkar?

Answer Options:

- (a) Discovery of India (b) Annihilation of Caste
(c) India after Gandhi (d) Indian Freedom Struggle

Ans. (b)

1.9 Further Reading

1. Keer, Dhannanjoy ; Dr. Balasaheb Ambedkar : life and mission, popular prakashan Bombay.
2. Rodrigues, Valerian : The essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar. Oxford University Press, 2002.
3. Do-Ambedkar as a political philosopher Economic and Political weekly, April, 15,2017 vol. 1.11 no 15.
4. Rajasekhariah, A.M. and Jayaraj. Hemlata : Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar. The Indian journal of Political Science, July-Sept, 1991, vol 52, no.3

Unit - 2 □ Ambedkar and Political Reform in Colonial India

Structure

2.1 Objective

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Ambedkar and Political Reforms in Colonial India

2.4 Conclusion

2.5 Summing Up

2.6 Probable Questions

2.7 Further Reading

2.1 Objective

After going through this unit, students will learn :

- various reforms Ambedkar sought
- programmes and movements launched by Ambedkar for the upliftment of the depressed classes.

2.2 Introduction

Ambedkar's mission was to fight all forms of tyranny, injustice, superstition, false tradition and to destroy all sorts of privileges so that the oppressed and exploited untouchables are released from bondage. The constraints of the social order in which he lived led him to the realm of action. He was not only thinker but also a determined social engineer and reformer. He followed his mission with a single minded devotion all along his life and this made him a great fighter for social justice and emancipator of the depressed classes. He realized that a truly democratic society would be established in India only when the depressed classes were allowed to enjoy basic human rights. He advocated the urgent need for reforming the Hindu social order so that the untouchables are integrated into Indian society in modern ways.

2.3 Ambedkar and Political Reforms in Colonial India

Ambedkar mission was to bring the untouchables from a state of slavery into one of equality using modern methods based on education and the exercise of legal and political rights. He had clear understanding of the tenacity of caste and tradition. This made him aware of the need of awakening in the untouchable an awareness of their debased condition and common interests that would promote the unity necessary for the development of effective organization and mass action. In course of his public life over three decades he was convinced that politics should be the instrument to fight for the emancipation of the untouchables from bondage. He relentlessly worked towards the goal of justice for the untouchable using political means.

Being an untouchable Ambedkar had to face discrimination in every stage of his life. He was convinced that nothing can be achieved by way of progress without changing the existing social order. Nothing can be build on the foundation of caste. In his essay, *Caste in India : Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, Ambedkar analyzed how the caste system has evolved over the years and the reasons for its survival. While making his submission before Reforms Committee and Southborough Committee on January 27, 1919 he referred to the state of slavery of the untouchables and denial of basic human rights to them. He pleaded before the committee for a separate electorate for the depressed classes as had been conceded for Muslims. With the help of the Maharaja of Kolhapur he started the publication of weekly journal *Mook Nayak, Leader of the Dumb*. In an article of this Journal Ambedkar asserted that the swaraj where in there were no fundamental rights guaranteed for the depressed classes, would not be a swaraj to them. It would be a new slavery for them.

In his submission before the Southborough Committee Ambedkar asserted that any scheme of franchise that failed to ensure representation of opinions as well as persons is far removed from the ideal of popular government. According to him the first purpose of representation is to transmit the force of individual opinion and preference into public action. In India the untouchables having no representation could not shape public policy. He argued that separate electorate for the depressed classes could be a way of dissolving social divisions by bringing together men from diverse castes and creating conditions for a new form of associated life. It would ensure social inclusion and public presence. It provides an opportunity to persons and groups who have been hitherto excluded, to be reckoned in public life. The 1919 Act recognized for the first time in Indian history the existence of the depressed classes.

In the central Legislative Assembly among the fourteen non-official members nominated by the Governor General one was representative of the depressed classes.

In 1924 Ambedkar Founded Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha for removing difficulties of the untouchables and representing the grievance of the depressed classes. He advocated reform for the recognition and reconstruction of Hindu society. His objective was to create in the heart of the untouchables an emotion of confidence, hope and aspiration for their own salvation. The establishment of the Sabha was a major step for creating sense of self-respect among the depressed classes. It started a hostel at Sholapur for high school students belonging to the untouchable groups.

1927 Ambedkar decided to launch active movements against untouchability. He began with public movements and marches to open up and share public drinking water resources. In 1927 he led the famous Mahad Satyagraha to assert the right of the untouchables to have access to public wells and tanks. Despite bitter opposition by the vested interests, Satyagraha achieved its aim. The Mahad Satyagraha had a far reaching impact upon the untouchables. They realized the importance of organization and active struggle. On 25th December 1927. Ambedkar led thousands of followers to burn copies of Manusmriti as it justified caste discrimination. For him Manusmriti has been the charter of rights for the caste Hindus and slavery for the untouchables. In the late 1920s Ambedkar sought to radicalize the initiative taken by Gandhi to bring about social transformation. He introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislature for amending the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act 1874. According to this Act, the Mahars, the holder of the posts, were treated as slaves. They had to work all day and night; and in the absence of a Mahar servant, his father or any member of his family was forced into government service. For this hard and arduous work they each got a piece of land called Watan, some corn from the villagers and a meager monetary compensation. Ambedkar introduced the Bill to break the shackles of serfdom.

While introducing the Bill Ambedkar drew attention of the assembly to the fact that watan lands were given to the Mahars by the ancient emperors of the country. He went on to say that the government had neither increased the amount of land nor remuneration of these people despite increasing prices and the consequent increase in the cost of living. He observed that with the enormous increase of population, land assigned to the Mahars was fragmented to such an extent that income from this watan land was almost nothing. He proposed that watan lands should be given to the holders of those posts at the full rate of assessment and they should be relieved from the obligation to serve. He founded the Samaj Sangh in September 1927 and the Samata Sainik Dal in December 1927 to fight for the cause of social equality.

Ambedkar constantly raised the demand for appointments of able men from among the depressed classes to higher posts in government offices. His criticism of the government policy did not go well with the British Governor, Sir Leslie Wilson. However, Ambedkar retorted that Wilson's Government had not taken any initiative to promote the interests of the depressed classes and had shown little interest in selecting qualified and able men among them for higher posts. Impressed by Ambedkar's persuasive arguments the Governments changed its attitude towards the employment of candidates belonging to the depressed classes.

As a member of the Legislative Assembly he was determined to carry out his crusade against exploitation of the depressed classes. In his speeches on the budget he brought to the notice of the Assembly the burden imposed on the poor and task the administration to talk for being neither representative nor accountable.

Ambedkar was selected to the Bombay Provincial Committee to work with the all-European Simon Commission in August 1928. He submitted a statement before the Commission outlining the perspective of the depressed classes and his own political position. On behalf of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha he submitted a statement to the commission demanding joint electorates with reservation of seats for the depressed classes. He also emphasized on the urgent need for education of the depressed classes and giving them the right to recruitment in the army, navy and police. He made a plea for an administration based on universal adult franchise.

Ambedkar's main concern was to secure the constitutional and legal rights for the depressed classes. He realized that educational backwardness of the depressed classes was an impediment to their progress. He tried every possible means to spread education among them. He took the initiative for the establishment of the Depressed Classes Education Society in June 1928. The society established hostels in Thane, Nasik, Pune, Panvel and Dharward for high school students belonging to the depressed classes.

Ambedkar played a prominent role in the kalaram temple movement, in 1930, for the entry of the untouchables to this temple in Nasik. This movement was for human dignity and self-respect. His political activities during the 1920s made him aware that the British administration was not sympathetic to the pleas of the untouchables. His experience during this period taught him that the upper castes were reluctant to bring about social and religious changes to ensure equality. In his judgement Gandhi was too soft on orthodoxy and he increasingly turned against Gandhi and Brahminism.

Ambedkar attended the first Round Table Conference in London, in 1930 as a representative of the depressed classes. Speaking before the conference Ambedkar

highlighted the need for a government in India which would be guided by the best interests of the country and would not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life to promote social justice. In his own judgement the conference had laid the foundation of the self-government of India.

At the end of the general discussion in the plenary session, the Conference appointed nine sub-committees and Ambedkar was a member of all the important sub-committees except the Federal Structure Committee. In the course of the deliberation over the report of the Provincial Subcommittee he argued that second chamber was absolutely undesirable in any province in India. His most important contribution was the preparation of the Declaration of Fundamental Rights safeguarding the cultural, religious and economic rights of the depressed classes. These rights included equal citizenship rights of the depressed classes, their adequate representation in the legislature, and services.

The position taken by the representatives of different communities, pressure tactics adopted by several depressed class associations, uncertainty of the introduction of universal adult franchise and lastly the attitude of the Congress and its leader Gandhi forced Ambedkar to change his position in favour of a separate electorate for the depressed classes. At the Second Round Table Conference Gandhi vehemently opposed Ambedkar's demand for separate electorate for the depressed classes. After negotiating with the representative of the minorities Ambedkar signed a pact, known as the Minorities pact. He suggested alternative documents for possible constitutional reforms in India. In his submission before the federal structure committee Ambedkar proposed that states' representatives to the Federal Assembly should be chosen by election, not by nomination. He argued that the principle of nomination was against the principle of responsible government. He opposed special representation for the landlords on the ground that by aligning with the orthodox elements they would defeat the ends of freedom and progress. Many proposals suggested by him were incorporated in the Government of India Act 1935.

In the proceedings of the Franchise Committee Ambedkar suggested to incorporate in the Indian Penal Code or in the future constitution punishment for instigation or promotion of boycott against the depressed classes which prevented them from the enjoyment of fundamental rights. The suggestion was accepted in the Franchise Committee. On 16th August 1932, the British Prime Minister announced to grant separate electorates for the depressed classes known as Communal Award. It gave separate electorates to the Muslims, Sikhs, Europeans and Christians. Gandhi was against the Communal Award. He feared that it would divide Hindu society based on

caste. He declared his resolve to fast unto death if the separate electorates for the depressed classes were not abolished. After immense pressure from political leaders, Ambedkar as representative of depressed classes and Madan Mohan Malviya for the upper caste Hindu signed the famous Poona Pact which ended Gandhi's fast. The core of this pact was the promise of a joint electorate with reservation for depressed classes. Ambedkar thought that the joint electorate was a mechanism for selecting a member of the depressed classes who was acceptable to the caste Hindus. Following the Poona Pact, an Anti-untouchability League was set up. Ambedkar accepted membership of its executive committee. However he was in total disagreement with Gandhi's understanding and strategy for removing untouchability and resigned from it in 1933.

By 1935, Ambedkar has lost all hope that Hinduism could be reformed. From the late 1930s Ambedkar sought to broadbase some of his concerns. In 1936 he introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly for the abolition of the khoti System of land tenure prevailed in the Konkon regions in Maharashtra. It subjected a vast majority of the rural poor to virtual serfdom. The Bill advocated the replacement of the Khoti system by the Ryotwari system intending to give poor farmers the status of occupants under the Land Revenue Code 1879.

In 1938 Congress government introduced Industrial Trade Dispute Bill in the Bombay Legislature. Ambedkar joined hands with the left in Bombay to oppose the Bill. He argued that the proposed Bill would impose curbs on the labour movement. The Bill made strike under certain circumstances illegal and as such affected the right of the labourer.

As a member of the Viceroy's Council Ambedkar worked out a fairly comprehensive policy for reservation for schedule castes in the services. During this period several labour laws were enacted and tripartite linkage between labour, industry and government were established. He designed the foundation for a comprehensive labour legislation. He showed keen interest in some of the major development projects such as the Damodar Valley Corporation and the Mahanadi river projects. He played key role on designing the foundation of the emerging welfare state.

The Cabinet Mission arrived in India in March 1946 for solving the political problems in India. Ambedkar submitted a memorandum before the Mission asking for a provision to be made in the constitution for the election of the schedule castes through separate electorates. He demanded adequate representation of the schedule castes in the central and Provincial Legislature, and also in the Central and Provincial Executives, in Public Services and on the Public Service Commissions. He pleaded for

inclusion of these safeguard in the new constitution. He worked desparately to achieve his end.

Ambedkar joined the Nehru cabinet on 3rd August 1947. On 19th August 1947, he was made the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution. Major part of the constitution was based on his cenceptual framework. He was actively associated with the previous constitutional developments, including the Government of India Act, 1935. As a law minister Ambedkar prepared many important bills. Hind Code Bill was an attempt by him to transform the hierarchical relations associated with the Hindu social order and bring them in line with the values embodied in the constitutions. The constitutional provisions, his support for state socialism, and the transformation of the Hindu social order, were attempts to implement his project of the 1920s.

2.4 Conclusion

Ambedkar was a fighter for the dignity of man and the saviour of suppressed people. He tried to galvanize untouchables into action with slogan “Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against the slavery”. He organized movements and founded institutions to champion the cause of the backward castes. He demanded an autonomous political representation to the disadvantaged groups not only to ensure their political presence but to ensure their all round development. He sought reservation for the disadvantaged groups in public employment. He felt that they would be inevitably marginalized if such support was not legally extended to them. He sought extensive supportive policy measures towards these groups so as to extend to them the benefits of various development and welfare measures that a state undertakes.

2.5 Summing Up

1. Ambedkar was a fighter for the dignity of man and the saviour of suppressed people.
2. He sought extensive supportive policy measures towards these groups so as to extend to them the benefits of various development and welfare measures that a state undertakes.
3. As a member of the viceroy’s Council Ambedkar worked out a fairly comprehensive policy for reservation for schedule castes in the services.

4. He was actively associated with the constitutional developments, including the Government of India Act, 1935.
5. Ambedkar's mission was to bring the untouchable from a state of slavery into one of equality using modern methods based on education and the exercise of legal and political rights.

2.6 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Write an essay on Ambedkar's various reformative endeavour during the colonial era.
2. Discuss Ambedkar's role in the fight against Mahar Vatan System and Khoti System.
3. Why did Ambedkar demand a separate electorate for the depressed classes?

B. Short Questions :

1. Write a short note on Poona Pact.

C. Objective Questions (MCQ) :

1. Name the journal with which Ambedkar was associated

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (a) Mook Nayak | (b) Young India |
| (c) Vande Mataram | (d) Bangadarshan |

Ans. (a)

2. In which year did Ambedkar form Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1920 | (b) 1924 |
| (c) 1925 | (d) 1930 |

Ans. (b)

3. Which amongst the following formed the core of the Poona Pact?

Answer Options:

- | |
|---|
| (a) Reservation for the minorities |
| (b) Joint Electorate |
| (c) Joint Electorate with reservation for the depressed classes |
| (d) None |

Ans. (c)

4. Which ministry was allotted to Ambedkar in Nehru's Cabinet?

Answer Options:

- (a) Finance Minister (b) Industry Minister
(c) Law Minister (d) None

Ans. (c)

5. Ambedkar was a supporter of?

Answer Options:

- (a) Authoritarian State (b) Socialist State
(c) Welfare State (d) None

Ans. (c)

2.7 Further Reading

1. Rodrigues valerian : The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar, Oxford University Press 2002
2. Keer, Dhananjay – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : Life and Mission, Popular prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai 2009.
3. Omvedt, Gail, Dalit Visions : The Anti-Caste Movement and the construction of an Indian Identity New Delhi, orient Longman, 1996.

Unit - 3 □ Ambedkar's conception of Freedom and his role in Freedom Struggle

Structure

- 3.1 Objective**
- 3.2 Introduction**
- 3.3 Ambedkar's concept of freedom**
- 3.4 Ambedkar's role in the freedom struggle**
- 3.5 Conclusion**
- 3.6 Summing Up**
- 3.7 Probable Questions**
- 3.8 Further Reading**

3.1 Objective

After reading this unit, students will be familiar with

- Ambedkar's concepts of freedom.
- Ambedkar's understanding of nationalism
- Ambedkar's role in the freedom movement

3.2 Introduction

Ambedkar developed his social and political ideas in the context of the common problems of the depressed classes of India. He sought to build a new social order where the dignity of the individual is established and he is free from the fetters of ignorance, shame and humiliation. His vision of society is based on liberty, equality and fraternity. He discarded the infallibility of Vedas and repudiated Varna system and graded inequality. He wanted equality and civil rights for those who were for centuries deprived of them. In the course of his public life he attempted to elaborate a full fledged theory of nationalism and sought to apply it critically to the Indian situation.

3.3 Ambedkar's concept of freedom

In the Indian tradition the term closer to liberty is *mukti*. Understood either as renunciation or as deliverance from the chain of rebirths, the term *mukti* did not refer to freedom from social restrictions.

Ideas of modern liberty came to colonial India through three different routes : colonial legal framework accompanied by tacit understanding of rights and freedom of individuals; spread of western education, and intellectual influence of western social thinking. With the rise of the middle class and spread of non-traditional salaried job, freedom began to be understood in an individualistic manner, women were elevated from their subordinate position in the joint family to that of a companion. In the religious sphere freedom was expressed through the formation of association; voluntary association emerged to carry out educational projects, advancement of women and promotion of sports etc. However opportunities to form and enter these associations were limited to the upper caste elites. Two pioneers of freedom from social restrictions in India—Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Rammohan Roy—were a part of this elite.

In western India, however, thinkers from depressed classes used idea of social freedom to attack caste hierarchy, notably Jyotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar located the meaning of freedom in the everyday life of caste indignities. For Ambedkar, freedom had two aspects to it—liberation of the depressed classes from upper caste domination and affirmative action with regard to jobs in the colonial administration. This strand remained in a state of potential conflict with the nationalist strand—freedom from colonial rule.

Ambedkar was a liberal thinker who believed that rights and liberties were necessary for complete development of human personality. He was particularly concerned with the conditions of the scheduled castes who were facing discrimination not only by the British but also by the upper castes. Social justice being the main plank of his political philosophy tempered by humanism, he tried to build a system of rights and liberties of all individuals of the society through and by law. His conception of freedom is based on the assumption that every individual has certain inalienable rights. According to him the state exists for preventing injustice and tyranny through a system of rights and liberties. He was opposed to any form of discrimination and exploitation based on caste, sex, race, creed, place of birth etc. To him, right to life, liberty and property are the natural and inherent rights of individuals and these rights have to be recognized by the fundamental law of the land.

Ambedkar saw freedom, equality and fraternity as necessary conditions for a good life and argued that they should be understood and pursued as one entity. A comprehensive regime of rights could be built only on their foundation. A social order based on the principle of liberty and equality would make different moral and religious pursuits reasonable. To liberate the depressed classes from upper caste domination and make the free and equal social agents Ambedkar demanded preferential treatment for them. He envisaged such support at various levels from collective decision making to placement in jobs and services.

3.4 Ambedkar's role in the freedom struggle

Ambedkar did not participate in the movement for the political independence of the country; rather he opposed the mainstream national movement. This he did with full knowledge. He grappled with the ideology of nationalism of 19th century. Europe, deconstructed it as to what is perennial and peripheral in it and showed how it could be critically applied to the peculiarities of the colonial Indian situation.

Ambedkar fought against internal opposition as well as external domination. He wanted equality and civil rights for those who for centuries were deprived of them. For him, Indian society was a system which gave no scope for the growth of the sentiment of equality and fraternity which are essential for the growth of nationalist attitude and feeling. He wanted constitutional safeguard to protect the oppressed. According to him, Indian society was nothing but gradation of castes consisting of ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt. He had transparent view regarding foreign domination. In his judgment British attitude was Indifferent towards removing the social evils which had horrified the lives of the people belonging to the depressed classes. He regarded the advent of the British in India as providential and responsible for the intellectual awakening and the concept of liberty, equality and fraternity. In the first session of the Depressed Classes Congress at Nagpur in 1930 he described the British Government in India as the costliest government of the world. According to him there was no parallel to the poverty of the Indian people in any part of the world. He asserted that the cause of their chronic poverty was the deliberate policy pursued by the British Government in the conduct of the government of India.

In Ambedkar's well thought judgment colonialism benefited the untouchables the least except for the rule of law it inaugurated. He had no defense to offer in favour of British rule. But at the same time he was against transferring power to those who would promote partisan ends in the name of the people. He insisted on a responsible and accountable government based on adult franchise.

Nationalism in Ambedkar originates from his emphasis on dignity both for the people and for the country. It was his deep concern for the poor and untouchables that inspired him to fight against denial of the basic human rights. Ambedkar's approach was called by some Congress leaders as anti-national but in true sense, it was nothing but expression of humanism and nationalism to which Ambedkar was sincerely devoted.

For Ambedkar freedom from alien rule was no more significant than freedom from internal slavery and exploitation. In his view freedom means both freedom of the country and its people. He put emphasis on the emancipation and empowerment of the oppressed people who for years remained enslaved by varna Hindus. A nation must be truly representative of all people. This is only possible when the oppressed people are quite free from fear, oppression and exploitation. Ambedkar's considered judgment was that nationalist leaders in general and Hindu nationalists in particular laid excessive emphasis on the political freedom ignoring social aspects of nationalism.

In the course of his presidential address in the first session of the Depressed Classes Congress at Nagpur on 8th August, 1930. Ambedkar said that it was possible for the people of India to become one united self-governing community. However, he affirmed that the diversity of conditions and people prevalent in India must be given due considerations while framing the constitution for a self governing India. Caste-ridden Hindu oligarchy which was clamouring for power had been responsible for the continuance of the curse of untouchability under which crores of people were denied basic human rights and benefits of civilization and culture.

According to Ambedkar the Congress did not prescribe the removal of untouchability as a franchise for its memberships; nor did Gandhi declare a crusade against untouchability. In his judgment Congress was a national movement and not a political party. He had little doubt that when the time for test come, many Congressmen would be in the camp of the classes and not of the masses.

Ambedkar emphasized on the need to fight against casteism, linguism, communalism and separatism. For him these social evils divide the people into small units which are against the spirit of nationalism. Communalism, in his opinion, is a form of groupism and is inimical to equality and fraternity. He viewed nationalism as a spiritual phenomenon rooted in humanism. According to him nationalism and patriotism creates a strong sense of social brotherhood in doing justice to the needy who live in the same country but are not treated as complete man. In his view patriotism demands action in the right direction and reaction against all wrong and a nationalist leader should have deep faith in himself to fight against imperialism, social tyranny, casteism, communalism, forced labour etc.

According to Ambedkar nationalism should be based on a strong will to live as a nation and deep feeling to make a cultural home with definite territory. Political unity will not alone bring about such kind of nationalism rather social unity would be more conducive to bring about a sense of human brotherhood. In order to create a sense of human brotherhood he laid emphasis on spiritual unity of the people and discouraged all kinds of heterogeneity, doubts and differences. Nationalism in Ambedkar developed in protest both against external domination and internal oppression. The indifferent attitude of the British government towards establishing social equality and civic liberty made him very vocal. Speaking before the Round Table Conference Ambedkar said that the British Government was no good to anybody. He was not only against British imperialism but also advocated self-government. He realized that by the end of the 19th century, it had become an accepted principle that the people who constituted a nation were entitled to self-government.

Ambedkar's understanding of nationalism and Indian national movement have never received adequate intellectual attention. The failure to situate Ambedkar in a proper historical and nationalist perspective has left the ground quite wide open for uncalled for criticism. He was stigmatized as a reactionar, a stooge of British Government, a traitor to the country and a destroyer of Hinduism.

Arun Shourie in his book *Worshipping False Gods; Ambedkar and the Facts* which have been erased criticises Ambedkar for opposing national movement. According to Shourie Ambedkar supported British rule because he was motivated by selfish interests, regardless of any nationalist sentiment Ambedkar's appointment to the Viceroy's council in 1942 allowed support of some Indians to suppress the quit Indian Movement. Shourie condemns Ambedkar as agent of British Government who made the cause of British imperial rule his own. In Shourie's judgement Ambedkar did neither have any nationalist sense nor any sense of right and wrong. It is a fact that Ambedkar had financial difficulties throughout his life but he never betrayed his caste fellows. If he was motivated by selfish careerist interests he would not have resigned from Nehru's cabinet in 1951.

Ambedkar earnestly believed that social solidarity was the key to struggle against colonialism. He realized that so long as the depressed classes remained socially peripheral, India could not fight unitedly against British imperialism. In fact the anti-colonial movement and movement against untouchability were parts of the process of formation of a modern nation. During the struggle for freedom, when the Congress leaders laid emphasis on political aspects of national independence, Ambedkar put

emphasis on securing equality for all. Ambedkar supported British rule till the point it was needed for the progress of Dalits within Indian society. He did not support British rule for ever.

Ambedkar was not anti-national. In his letter to Sardar Patel during the Poona Satyagraha he wrote that he considered the country greater than any individual howsoever great he might be. He also wrote that one could be a great nationalist without being a Congressman and he was a greater nationalist than any Congress leader.

Ambedkar clearly stated at several conferences and at the first session of the Round Table Conference that the fate of the depressed classes would improve only in a free India. But he apprehended that reins of government would fall into the hands of the majority which was hostile to the interests and welfare of the depressed classes. So sometimes his enthusiasm for political independence waned.

S.M. Gaikwad in his essay Ambedkar and Indian Nationalism observes that Ambedkar turned down any form of independence that did not guarantee political representation to untouchables. But he never opposed to India gaining independence. Ambedkar contributed to nation building by emphasizing on the elimination of caste consideration which was preventing India from constituting itself as a unified nation. According to Gaikwad, Ambedkar never participated in Indian's struggle for freedom, in fact he opposed it. But at the same time his opposition helped to widen the internal scope of freedom, making it really meaningful for the depressed classes.

3.5 Conclusion

Ambedkar's conception of freedom and his understanding of India's freedom struggle results primarily from the dichotomy between the political and the social, Nationalist leaders like Gandhi laid excessive emphasis on the political, almost ignoring the social aspect of freedom and nationalism. In Ambedkar's judgment in the absence of social equality the political is bound to suggest that the local tyrants are preferable on patriotic ground. His opposition to Congress led freedom movement helped to widen the scope of freedom which made it really significant for the depressed classes.

3.6 Summing Up

- i) Ambedkar sought to build a new social order where the dignity of the individual is established and he is free from the fetters of ignorance, shame and humiliation.

- ii) He discarded the infallibility of Vedas and repudiated Varna system and graded inequality.
- iii) Ambedkar saw freedom, equality and fraternity as necessary conditions for a good life and argued that they should be understood and pursued as one entity.
- iv) In Ambedkar's judgment in the absence of social equality the political equality is bound to suggest that the local tyrants are preferable on patriotic ground.
- v) Ambedkar earnestly believed that social solidarity was the key to struggle against colonialism.

3.7 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. How did Ambedkar conceptualize freedom in the Indian context?
2. Evaluate Ambedkar's role in Indian's struggle for freedom.
3. Comment on Ambedkar's concept of nationalism.
4. Why did Ambedkar oppose Congress led freedom movement?

B. Short Questions :

1. Write a short note on Ambedkar's concept of social freedom.
2. What was Ambedkar's judgement of British rule in India?

C. Objective Questions :

1. In which year was the first Depressed Classes Congress held?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1920 | (b) 1925 |
| (c) 1930 | (d) None |

Ans. (C)

2. In which year Ambedkar resigned from Nehru's Cabinet?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1951 | (b) 1955 |
| (c) 1950 | (d) None |

Ans. (a)

3. What kind of independence Ambedkar wanted?

Answer Options:

- (a) Independence without political representation of the untouchables
- (b) Independence with political representation to the high castes
- (c) Independence with political representation of the untouchables
- (d) None

Ans. (c)

4. Who wrote the book, 'Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission'?

Answer Options:

- (a) Dr. R. P. Raj
- (b) Dhananjay Keer
- (c) Arun Shourie
- (d) None

Ans. (b)

3.8 Further Reading

1. Keer Dhananjay : Dr. Balasaheb Ambedkar : Life and Mission, popular prakashan LTD. Mumbai, 1971.
2. Rodrigues, Valerian : The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar OUP Delhi 2004
3. Kuber, W.N. Dr. Ambedkar : A critical study ppit New Delhi
4. Gaikwad, S.M. Ambedkar and Indian Nationalism, Economic and Political Weekly March. 7. 1998.
5. Shourie Arun : Worshipping False Gods : Ambedkar and the Facts which have been erased. New Delhi, ASA, 1997.

Unit - 4 □ Constitutionalism and Ambedkar

Structure

4.1 Objective

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Ambedkar's idea of Constitutionalism

4.4 Conditions necessary for successful working of constitutional democracy

4.5 Conclusion

4.6 Summing Up

4.7 Further Reading

4.1 Objective

After going through this unit, students will be familiar with

- Ambedkar's idea of constitutionalism, relationship between constitutionalism and democracy.
 - Ambedkar's views on the prerequisites of successful democracy.
-

4.2 Introduction

The major area of Ambedkar's work was on constitutional democracy. He was familiar with different constitutions of the world particularly those that provided an expansion of democracy. Rule of law as a bond uniting people and ensuring equal participation of people in collective affairs was central to his imagination. With long drawn prejudices and denial of justice in public culture and colonial rule unrestrained by constitutionalism and rule of law he thought that the role of the state based on law and democratic mandate is crucial. He envisaged a democracy informed by law and a law characterised by sensitivity to democracy.

4.3 Ambedkar's idea of Constitutionalism

Ambedkar advocated constitutionalism as a democratic value and as a framework of legitimate political process, which would bring about social change. According to

him Indian society characterised by deep-seated inequalities was a threat to democracy. It was necessary to make democracy work in Indian conditions and make it durable. The Hindu social order based on caste system and the adverse impact of colonial rule had created conditions unfavourable for building a durable democracy. In the post colonial situation constitution making was a conscious attempt to break with the past and create a vision of the future. In the Indian context constitutionalism implied self-rule and establishment of democratic government based on people's consent. Power could not be exercised arbitrarily. It must be bound by rules, norms and principles and the rule of law. In the post-colonial societies constitutions held out the promise of democratic transition and consolidation. Constitutionalism in India was a product of anti-colonial movement and was tied to the nationalist project. Ambedkar drafted several documents which were to shape the constitutional developments in India. He remained an ardent supporter of constitutional democracy throughout. He also believed that certain core principles needed to inform not merely the institutional arrangement of governance, but society at large. These principles had to be cultivated and must spread wide and deep among the Indian people to sustain democracy.

Objectives Resolution adopted in the Constituent Assembly as guidelines described the constitution as a promise and a pledge. The Resolution laid down the objectives of the constitution of India. Nehru referred to the historical moment of constitution making as a promise for change—as a movement from one age to another. But Ambedkar while presenting the final draft of the constitution for its adoption described the moment as one of contradiction. The contradiction was between formal political equality in the political sphere and a highly unequal social and economic order. The persistence of this contradiction, according to Ambedkar, would endanger Indian democracy.

While presenting the draft constitution to the constituent Assembly Ambedkar said that a large part of the provisions had been borrowed from the Government of India, Act 1935, and concerned mostly with the details of administration. These ideally administrative details should have no place in the constitution. Ambedkar justified their inclusion by taking recourse to the idea of constitutional morality. According to him diffusion of constitutional morality was important for the smooth working and sustenance of a democratic constitution. For him form of administration is closely related to the form of the constitution. He was against giving authority to the legislature to prescribe the form of administration until constitutional morality had taken deep roots in the Indian soil.

In the Constituent Assembly during discussion on the objective resolutions moved by Nehru, M. R. Jayakar proposed an amendment seeking postponement of the passing of resolution until the Muslim League and Indian states representatives came into the Assembly. Ambedkar was invited by Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly to speak on the Resolution. Ambedkar said that the first part of the resolution relating to the territorial and institutional organisation of governmental power, federal structure and popular sovereignty was controversial and the second part dealing with fundamental rights of the citizen and minority rights was non controversial. The Resolution enunciate only rights without prescribing remedies open to the injured parties. Ambedkar described the constitutional remedies as the very soul of the constitution and the very heart of it. There could be no rights in the absence of remedies. According to him it was much better to be limited in the scope of our rights and make them real by incorporating remedies than to have a lot of pious wishes embodied in the constitution.

As architect of the constitution of India Ambedkar was primarily concerned with the ultimate goals to be achieved and the difficulty of coming together of the majority and minority communities. He was aware that absence of complete safeguards for peoples rights might lead to arbitrary executive action. Equally he did not have trust in the legislative power. He wanted the majority and the minority communities march together as willing partner to build a strong republic and thereby making popular sovereignty a reality.

In his speech in the Constituent Assembly during the presentation of the first draft of the constitution and later on the occasion of the presentation and adoption of the final draft of the constitution Ambedkar focussed on two key aspects. The first one was related to the protection fundamental rights, especially the rights of the minority communities. The second aspect dealt with the condition necessary for making democracy sustainable. It was while dealing with the second aspect Ambedkar clarified the idea of constitutional morality as essential condition for democracy.

Constitutional provisions providing safeguard to minorities became a contentious issue during discussion in the Constituent Assembly. Clarifying his views on minority rights Ambedkar observed that majority could not deny the existence of minorities and it was wrong on the part of the minorities to perpetuate themselves as such. The solution to this problem lied in finding ways to live together which was important for unity of the country. According to Ambedkar minorities were an explosive force which could blow up the whole fabric of the state.

On the question of popular sovereignty in constitutional democracies, Ambedkar argued that persistence of the rule by the majority had made it elusive. Popular sovereignty implies that the source of political power and its legitimacy is drawn from the entire population. But in reality, according to Ambedkar, power rests with the dominant majority. Ambedkar in his speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25th November 1949, argued that democracy in India was about securing to entire people justice, equality and freedom with adequate safeguards for minorities, backward and depressed classes.

4.4 Conditions necessary for successful working of constitutional democracy

Constitutionalism implies absence of arbitrary power. Constitutions provide the fundamental and higher order rules which compel the power holders to govern according to the rule of law. Constitutions upheld the idea of popular sovereignty. While presenting the final draft of the constitution in the Constituent Assembly Ambedkar declared that India would be democratic country, but he was anxious about the future of constitutional democracy in India. There was a danger of democracy giving place to dictatorship. He was perturbed by the realisation of the fact that in addition to the old enemies of castes and creeds, India had too many political parties with diverse opposing ideologies. And these parties might place their interest above the country.

Ambedkar believed that this danger of democracy could be averted by social and economic change, which for him, was urgently needed to create favourable conditions for democracy in India. He identified four conditions to be met to sustain democracy in India. These are :

4.4.1 Constitution Morality

According to Ambedkar, constitution is important for success of democracy but more important was constitutional morality in polity and society. In his judgement to sustain democracy in India three things must be done. The first and foremost was to hold fast to the constitutional methods of achieving social and economic objectives and abandon the methods of civil disobedience, non co-operation and satyagraha. These methods were nothing but grammar of anarchy. According to him these means were justifiable when there was no alternative available to constitutional means.

In this speech in the constituent Assembly Ambedkar, following Grote, had stressed the importance of the spread of constitutional morality through out the entire people as an indispensable condition for the success of democracy. Constitutional morality in Grote refers to a permanent reverence to the forms of the constitutions. It entails freedom of speech and action subject only to defined legal control and unrestrained censure of those in authority for all their public acts. Constitutional morality demands a mode of association characterised by freedom and self-restraint. For Ambedkar self-restraint was an essential requirement to prevent revolution as a method of social change. Freedom and democracy could be sustained through constitutional methods of attaining the goals of social and economic change.

4.4.2 Avoiding Hero worship or bhakti

The second most important condition for ensuring the preservation of democracy is caution against heroworship or bhakti in politics. He quoted from John Stuart Mill who asked the defenders of democracy not to sacrifice their liberties at the feet of even a greatman or trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institution. According to him this caution is far more necessary in India than in any other country. In India bhakti plays a unique role in politics Bhakti may be a road to the salvation of the soul, but in politics it is a road to dictatorship.

Social and Economic Democracies

Third condition for the preservation of democracy is that the people must not be content with mere political democracy but they should make the political democracy a social and economic democracy as well. He observed that political democracy could not be sustained unless it is backed up by social democracy with liberty, equality and fraternity as the guiding principles of social life. He added that there was complete absence of equality and Fraternity in India. In the social sphere Indian society was based on graded inequality and in the economic sphere there existed unbridgeable gap between the rich and the poor. The contradiction between equality in political sphere and inequality in social and economic sphere must be resolved to save democracy.

Public Conscience

Ambedkar Considered public conscience as essential condition for successful working of democracy. According to him public conscience means “conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer and it means that everybody whether he suffers that particular wrong or not is prepared to join him in order to get him relieved”. Public conscience demands a different kind of bond based

on a feeling of empathy. Its absence would develop a revolutionary mentality which imperils democracy.

4.5 Conclusion

Ambedkar played key role in the constitutional development of India from the mid. 1920s. He evolved certain basic principles of constitutionalism for a complex society like India but argued that ultimately their resilience would depend on constitutional ethics. He felt that constitutional order expressed in the rule of law is imperative to sustain rights to maintain an order free from discrimination and exploitation and create a vibrant civil society. A healthy public order informed by constitutional morality and public conscience sustains public reason and popular participation and keeps emotive elements under check.

4.6 Summing Up

1. Ambedkar advocated constitutionalism as a democratic value and as a Framework of legitimate political process.
2. He believed that diffusion of constitutional morality was essential for the sustenance of democratic constitution.
3. As a chief architect of the constitution of India he focussed on two key aspects. These are : protection of fundamental rights of the people and conditions necessary for making democracy successful.

4.7 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Examine Ambedkar's views on constitutionalism and democracy.
2. What, for Ambedkar, are the essential conditions for the successful working of democracy in India.
3. What did Ambedkar mean by constitutional morality?

B. Short Questions :

1. What is meant by public conscience?
2. What was Ambedkar's chief argument against hero worship in politics?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Of which committee was Ambedkar the Chairman?

Answer Options:

- (a) Drafting Committee
- (b) Fundamental Rights Committee
- (c) Committee on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
- (d) None

Ans. (a)

2. Who moved the 'objectives resolution' in the Constituent Assembly?

Answer Options:

- (a) B. R. Ambedkar
- (b) Jawaharlal Nehru
- (c) Lal Bahadur Shastri
- (d) None

Ans. (b)

3. Mention one condition identified by Ambedkar for a successful working of the democratic constitution?

Answer Options:

- (a) Public conscience
- (b) Single party system
- (c) Unitary government
- (d) None

Ans. (a)

4. Which factor was regarded by Ambedkar as unfavourable for building a durable democracy?

Answer Options:

- (a) Hindu caste system
- (b) Communalism
- (c) One party dominance
- (d) None

Ans. (a)

4.8 Further Reading

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3. Keer, Dhananjay, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Life and Mission Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai, 1971.

Unit - 5 □ Ambedkar's perception of new India

Structure

5.1 Objective

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Ambedkar's perception of new India

5.3.1 United India with a strong centre

5.3.2 Social and economic democracy

5.3.3 Egalitarian society

5.4 Conclusion

5.6 Summing Up

5.7 Further Reading

5.1 Objective

After reading this unit learners will be able to explain :

- Ambedkar's understanding of the problems of nation building in India.
- His vision of new India.

5.2 Introduction

Ambedkar was the builder of modern India. He fought relentlessly to build a society based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. He sought to build a new social order based on emancipation and economic prosperity. He believed that in the absence of social and economic justice political freedom would fail to bring about fraternity. According to him the first step towards the attainment of social solidarity and nation building was the annihilation of the caste system. His primary goal was to establish a just society by eradicating all types of exploitation and oppression.

5.3 Ambedkar's perception of new India

5.3.1 United India with a strong centre

Ambedkar translated his vision of a strong and united nation respecting fundamental rights of citizens through institutions and a constitutional structure as contained in the Indian constitution. He wanted to create a united India with a strong center and readiness of the constituents to rise above sectoral identities and sectoral political aspirations. He desired to establish India as a strong country with a strong union that could bring equality, justice and progress for all Indians irrespective of their place of birth, religion, caste and gender.

Ambedkar's idea of nation building in India involves two primary aspects : a political authority and an integrated community. The greatest challenge was to weave together a country that was filled with diversity. The divisive policies of colonial power had left the country socially, economically and politically divided. The centuries of British colonial rule had destroyed the domestic economy. Society was divided along the line of caste and the country was suffering from the disturbing outbreak of violence that followed the painful partition. The challenge was to ensure that despite all these problems the country is kept together and strong.

Ambedkar held a realistic view of the state. Though he had a partiality for a unitary form of government, he thought federal form would serve the interests of a country like India better. He realized that a federal form of government was inevitable to preserve provincial autonomy. He was for division of powers between federal and state governments, but with over-centralisation. As regards the desirability of a strong centre he argued that it was difficult to prevent the centre from becoming strong. Conditions in the modern world are such that centralisation of powers is inevitable. Today when centripetal tendencies of different forms of regionalism causing unprecedented stresses and strains on the Indian polity the need for a strong centre which Ambedkar advocated becomes evident.

Ambedkar's appeal to the native states to fully integrate with the Indian Union on the same terms as the Indian provinces was guided by his conviction that such a move would give the Indian Union the strength it needs. The same spirit is expressed in his observations justifying the calling of India as a Union of States. According to him the federation is a union because it is indestructible. The country and the people may be divided into different states for convenience of administration, but the country is one integral whole. His concern for the unity and integrity of India was echoed in his views on the formation of linguistic provinces, recognition of Hindi as the official

language of the country and also in his support to the idea of uniform civil code.

Ambedkar's concern for the territorial integrity and national unity impacted his perception of minority problem in India. Like other members of the Constituent Assembly he viewed communalism as a potential threat to the national unity and integrity of the country. He sincerely believed that secularism and the constitutional safeguards for the preservation of the religious, cultural and linguistic identity of the minorities would bend them to unite as one nation by the bond of fraternity. He viewed tolerance of religious plurality as an essential condition for the foundation of prospective Indian nation.

5.3.2 Social and economic democracy

For Ambedkar democracy is not only a political doctrine but also a social doctrine. Democracy is the best way to initiate nation building in every multicultural, multiethnic or multilingual state. Democracy should guard against the 'tyranny of the majority' to protect minority, whether caste based, religious, linguistic, ethnic. He was a bitter critic of tyranny of the majority and any concentration of power. He always emphasized that political democracy would be incomplete without economic and social democracy.

For Ambedkar, democracy may be said to exist, when those who run the government can bring about fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people without bloodshed. The challenge in India was to create enabling conditions which would make fundamental social and economic changes without violence. In a society where unequal social structures were deeply entrenched, and two centuries of colonial rule had established institutions of government unrestrained by constitutionalism and rule of law, the task of inventing democratic procedure and institutions was a stupendous task. He made it clear that the structural conditions informed by deep-seated inequalities were a threat to democracy in India. It was important to make democracy work in Indian conditions and also to make it durable.

His vision of a democratic society was one in which there will be neither an oppressor class, nor a suppressed class, and there will be equality before law and in administration. There was a burning desire in him to build democracy in the social, economic and political sphere in India. According to him, social and economic democracy are the tissue and the fibre of political democracy. In his address to the constituent Assembly he said : "On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradiction. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic

life we will have inequality...” This contradiction, if allowed to persist, he cautioned, would imperil Indian democracy. He attached highest importance for establishing the principle of ‘one man one value’ along with the principle of ‘one man one vote’, ‘one vote one value’. In his perception of new India political power, economic strength and social position should be shared equally.

Egalitarian Society

Ambedkar held the view that social solidarity among the Indians could never be secured without equal access to income, capital assets and economic opportunities. Since India was primarily an agrarian country, he was particularly concerned with agricultural problem. According to him, there was monopoly control over land holdings by few people and this required urgent solution to establish a just society. His ideas regarding economic reform were expressed in the manifesto of the Independent Labour Party, formed by him. These are principle of state management and ownership of industry wherever it was in the interest of the people, enacting laws to regulate the employment of factory workers, fixing their work hours, making payment of adequate wages, providing for bonus, pension schemes and social insurance. The idea of democratic socialism has been reflected in his prescriptions for solving economic problems. He advocated collective farming through regulations issued by the government. He wanted agriculture to be treated as a state owned industry. He pleaded for nationalisation of manufacturing industry. He argued that taxation system required urgent reform.

In his scheme of things India was to be an egalitarian society in which there would be neither any oppressed class nor any class with all the privileges. The only way to achieve the goal of national unity was to provide the depressed classes its due share in power, resources, education and skill. His demand for the reservation of seats in legislatures and services for the depressed classes was the manifestation of his perception of nation building.

Ambedkar believed in the equality of human beings and considered every human being as an end in itself. He gave special emphasis on the guarantee of social, economic, political and religious freedoms for all without discrimination. His opposition to the persecution of one community by another deeply influenced his conception of a good state. A good state, according to him, was that which aimed at prevention of injustice, tyranny and oppression. In his view the aim of a just state was to protect the right of every subject to life liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Ambedkar realized that development of all, particularly the depressed classes, was a necessary condition for India to become a true nation. His conception of nation building was characterised by the pursuit of inclusive development policy. For the empowerment of the depressed classes there should be legal rights and constitutional safeguards. He was determined to secure equal rights, which he called citizenship rights, for all. According to him a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity should be the only alternative to a caste society.

Needlers to say that it is because of Ambedkar's uncompromising struggle for real freedom of India's millions of untouchables, a national consensus emerged in favour of abolition of untouchability and granting of certain constitutional safeguards to the depressed classes. The consensus eventually found expression in several provisions of the constitution which he so diligently built up as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. As a chairman of the Drafting Committee he did his best to make the constitution of India a politico-social and economic document. Time and again he emphasized the political democracy would be meaningless for the poor and downtrodden and hence our constitution must go beyond adult suffrage and fundamental rights and should define both the economic and political structure of the society. These ideas had abiding influence on the constitution of India.

5.4 Conclusion

Ambedkar was a great patriot and nationalist to the core. It would be unfair to regard him only as the leader of untouchable. As a matter of fact he was the leader of the oppressed classes. He stood for the equality of men and women, their equal remuneration and protection of their rights. He dreamt of a strong and united India, a country of peace prosperity and progress and a country in which political, social and economic freedoms were available to all without discrimination on grounds of caste, religion or sex. His adherence to humanism and rationality and his attachment to the poor and downtrodden do indicate that Ambedkar was a great nation builder.

5.5 Summing Up

- Ambedkar sought to build a new social order in India based on emancipation and economic prosperity.
- He wanted to create a united India with a strong center that could bring equality, justice and progress for all.
- For Ambedkar, political democracy would be incomplete without economic and social democracy.

5.6 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Evaluate the role of Ambedkar as a nation builder.
2. Examine Ambedkar's idea of a just state.
3. Examine Ambedkar's vision of a united India with a strong centre.
4. Discuss Ambedkar's concept of social and economic democracy.

B. Short Questions :

1. Write a short note on Ambedkar's idea of state socialism.
2. What are the key aspects of Ambedkar's view of an egalitarian society?

C. Objective Questions (MCQ) :

1. One element of Ambedkar's idea of nation-building is—

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| (a) An integrated community | (b) Political subjugation |
| (c) Caste hierarchy | (d) None |

Ans. (a)

2. Ambedkar was a critic of—

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| (a) Tyranny of the majority | (b) Rule of law |
| (c) Social justice | (d) None |

Ans. (a)

3. According to Ambedkar, political democracy cannot succeed without—

Answer Options:

- | |
|-----------------------------------|
| (a) Social democracy |
| (b) Economic democracy |
| (c) Social and economic democracy |
| (d) None |

Ans. (c)

4. Ambedkar attached importance to—

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) One man many values | (b) One man one value |
| (c) One man no value | (d) None |

Ans. (a)

5. Ambedkar was a supporter of?

Answer Options:

- (a) Weak center (b) Strong center
(c) Moderate with Center (d) None

Ans. (b)

5.7 Further Reading

1. Rodrigues, Valerian : The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2004.
2. Keer, Dhananjay : Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Life and Mission Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai, 1971.
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Module - 2
Ambedkar and Indian Society

Unit - 6 □ Nature of Indian Society

Structure

- 6.1 Objective**
- 6.2 Introduction**
- 6.3 India in historical perspective**
- 6.4 Caste Stratification of Indian Society**
- 6.5 Gender Relations in Indian Society**
- 6.6 India's tribes**
- 6.7 Ambedkar on Indian society**
- 6.8 Social change in India**
- 6.9 Conclusion**
- 6.10 Summing Up**
- 6.11 Probable Questions**
- 6.12 Further Reading**

6.1 Objective

- On going through this Unit, the learners we shall be able to understand—
- the diversity of Indian society
- the different population groups that inhabit the region
- the course of its development
- major social problems and their roots.
- ambedkar's views on Indian society

6.2 Introduction

India is a vast country with an assorted population. The region has been home to people coming from many different parts of the world, at different points of time in history. They have interacted with one another, countered one another and been influenced by one another. To travelers and distant observers, India has been seen as a land of rivers and mountains exuding the beauties of nature. At first glance, the complexities of society hardly meet the eye. Yet, the complexities are enormous. Understanding Indian society calls for an understanding of its long historical tradition, the different religious philosophical ethos, the long course of evolution of society that has at the same time brought forth significant changes as well as resisted transformation of its basic structural features in many respects.

The vast majority of the population today comprise of the Hindus accounting for around eighty percent of the total, but culturally speaking they are not a homogenous category. Apart from the mainstream Hindu Brahminical culture, numerous obscure sects can be found that broadly subscribe to Hinduism but digress significantly from its social system of hierarchy and its cultural traits. Talking of the religious minorities, Muslims are the largest religious minority group. They too have their diversities. Broadly speaking, they belong to the Sunni and Shia communities. Among the other religious minorities in the region are the Indian Christians, divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants and many denominational churches; Buddhism, which once had a wide spread in the region and had lost its hold following the revival of Vedic Hinduism, got a boost in the light Ambedkar's conversion movement launched in 1956; among the other smaller religious minorities are the Jains, Parsis and Jews. Regional identities too are significant in India as people across regions share a vast array of cultural traits that are reflected in speech, food, dress as well as world view.

6.3 India in Historical Perspective

Till the arrival of the British, the region that we today call India did not have a single administration and government. It was divided amongst several administrative systems; successive invaders plundered the region, setting up their own rule as and when they could. Instability was endemic; war was a way of life and as some dynasties expanded, others receded making for newer power equations. Many Hindu kingdoms rose and flourished for limited durations of time, but no lasting imperial domination was established by a Hindu people. The later Islamic rulers, first the

Turkish and then the Moghuls, succeeded in establishing their rule only over parts of what we know as India today, and that too was a predominantly military-political domination. The social fabric was left by and large undisturbed.

When the British took over the region, it was neither a single state, nor a single nation. Politically and administratively it presented the picture of a mosaic, the entire area being under the control of several rulers. Socially speaking, the region was divided not only amongst the Hindus and the Muslims, but also between tribe and tribe, caste and caste.

The British set up a unified administration in the region for the first time. Nonetheless, they seldom tried to impose their administration to the local level; rather the communities were on the whole left to manage their own affairs and settle their own accounts. Nevertheless, during the British days, the seeds of nationhood were sown and its emergence in a rudimentary form could be noted. Its basis was on the one hand to be found in the technological revolution introduced by the British and on the other hand in the common shared consciousness against the alien rule which generated a feeling of national identity. Despite these developments however, at no point of time were the bonds of unity so strong as to wipe out group loyalties in any absolute sense. People remained conscious of, and attached to their diverse identities which were based on caste, religion and ethnic loyalties. Sizeable sections of the population failed to share any feeling of oneness. As India became independent, the new rulers were thus left to deal with a divided people.

Today, India presents the picture of a large multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic culturally variegated state as Indian society continues to be indeed complex. The members of a single family and their relations with each other comprise a system of social relations in themselves. Apart from the family systems, Indian villagers typically maintain lineages, the endogamous groups called jatis, and village communities, all of which may be seen as systems. When a system of lineage organization is discussed, the component families are seen as the sub-systems of a lineage. Likewise, lineage can be considered a sub-system of a jati.

6.4 Caste Stratification of Indian Society

The dominant frame of society in India is the Hindu Brahminical system. Based on its principles, Indian society is hierarchically stratified along caste lines. The social structure is essentially inegalitarian. Institutionalised inequality and its cultural and economic coordinates render caste in India to be a unique system of social stratification.

This inequalitarian social order germinated in the late Vedic period. In course of time, through the Sutras and Shastras it got firmly structured, resulting in the social marginalisation of a vast section of the population. The Vedas comprise the 'holy books' of the Hindus. In a strict sense they include the collections of hymns, prayers and formulae found in the four Vedas, while in a very loose and broad sense it is popularly used to describe all 'sacred' Hindu books including the Brahmanas, Upanishads and the traditional Sutras. Both overt and covert violence went into the maintenance of the system. Imposition of fines, social ostracism and even physical violence, legitimized by social sanction, were not uncommon. Digression from the stipulated norms called forth a host of penalties depending on the caste of the digresser and the nature of the offence. Needless to say, when the offender hailed from the lower ranks of society the penalties were much harsher than when the violator hailed from the upper castes.

The Hindu Brahminical philosophy of *Varnashrama Dharma* has been central to caste stratification, the essence of it is that each individual in society must perform his 'varna' or caste stipulated functions. It has entrenched the socio-cultural and economic marginalisation of the low, 'untouchable castes', who form the core of what we call as the Dalit population today. Victims of Brahminical oppression, they were stigmatized as polluting to the upper orders of society. They were relegated to perform demeaning tasks, socially humiliated, and educationally deprived, and all in the name of religion. Over and above all and subsuming all, they have been denied through generations the very basis of human rights - human dignity. Members of these castes have been frequently abused, insulted, beaten up, and even massacred.

The caste structure of society as it thus developed, had meant the growth of a cultural system marked by a sharp distinction between what were considered degrading customs and status and respectable position and practices. The twice-born were expected to show greater concern for the transcendental complex than the other folk and to have less to do with the pragmatic complex. They were to follow the Sanskritic scriptures, abide by dietary and other injunctions, be more stringent in family matters, particularly with reference to women. Virginitiy in brides, chastity in wives and continence in widows were emphasized. One set of norms were applicable for the Sudras in matters of marriage, succession and adoption, and another set for the twice born.

Within the parameters of the Brahminical cultural perspective as it may be referred to, the culture of the upper castes was projected as superior, or put it in a different way, upper caste people were said to be 'cultured', whilst others were the

'uncultured' folk. A wide-ranging variety of tools, ranging from religious jargon and educational formulations to overt exercises of violence, were systematically used for the purpose of propagation and sustenance of the Brahminical notion. Sections of low caste Sudras and ati-sudras have at times been found to emulate rituals and customs associated with one or other of the upper castes in an attempt to gain greater dignity via the cultural route, to rise to a position of equivalence to the twice-born - a process referred to as Sanskritisation by the noted sociologist, M.N.Srinivas.

6.5 Gender Relations in Indian Society

The Indian social system, barring a few exceptions, is on the whole patriarchal which makes for overall male dominance. In link with it, remain the caste-based injunctions that add up to further perpetuate the subordination of women. Just as the marginalised include on the one hand the low castes, on the other hand all women suffer marginalization, the latter being visualised as equivalent to the Sudras. Women's discrimination has thus remained sanctified and reinforced by tradition.

Historically viewed, women in India have been persistently victims of brahminical oppression. The classical Hindu scriptures had relegated them to a distinctly inferior position compared to their male counterparts. On strict control of their sexuality rested the basics of caste stratification – caste endogamy. To ensure that inter-marriage amongst different caste members did not take place, strict separation of the sexes was advocated and control over women's bodies formed the crux of it. The notion of chastity, child marriage, and perpetual supervision were some of the many devices to render them incapable of treading the path of 'sin'. Independent functioning was taboo. The tutelage first of the father, then the husband and finally the son were the destiny of women.

Inequality entrenches marginality; it impinges on women's lives and finds reflection in crucial areas such as access to education, productive resources, right of control over their own bodies and is reinforced by violence that women experience virtually from conception till death. Violence in fact remains central to the reproduction of patriarchy and, in India, patriarchy is deeply shaped by caste.

Even as women en mass remain victims of persistent oppression in India, as already noted, there is a uniqueness about dalit women's lives and their victimhood that make them stand apart from others. Yet, their problems are hardly spoken about, as they seem to have fallen between the crevices of feminist and dalit discourses.

On close perusal it is evident that dalit women are amongst the worst victims of human rights violations. Most of them face several forms of violence over the years, either in one incident, or in a series of incidents of violence, in either or both the general community and the family. The more frequent forms of violence that are perpetrated against them are verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence and rape. Dalit women are easy targets of sexual harassment and violence at the hands of upper caste Hindu males. Rape of the dalit woman becomes a tool in the hands of the upper caste men to assert their power. Humiliating the women of dalit castes is seen as tantamount to not only humiliating the individual woman but the 'manhood' of the dalit caste men who remain helpless by-standers. Sexual violence against lower caste women is often linked to debt bondage. As the poor low caste individuals fail to honour their debt due to their extreme poverty, rape is used by upper castes as a means to settle their scores. The latter due to their prominent economic position easily abuse the former and link them in a relationship of "dominant-dominated".

Furthermore, ritual violence is widely prevalent against dalit women. The devadasi and jogini practices provide unique methods of legitimizing the physical exploitation of dalit women in the name of dedication to the gods.

Sexual harassment and dependence on the whims of middlemen and employers are routine, as extensive poverty from which the majority of dalit families suffer widely, force the dalit women to work for sustenance from an early age. As the Dalit women work predominantly in the unorganized sector, in urban regions, we find them working as domestic servants, construction workers, hawkers, petty traders, vegetable vendors, manual scavengers and the like. In rural areas, they work in the fields without any basic facilities. Their work is irregular, their wages are low and social security is nil.

6.6 India's Tribes

Along the fringes of mainstream Indian society, and amongst the most marginalized sections of India's population are the many tribal communities, who together account for a little more than eight percent of the total population of the country. For a non-tribal state as India is, their numbers are indeed large. While many tribal communities live in hilly or forested regions, they can be found from the high valleys near the spine of the Himalayas to the hills of south India. The main tribal territories are in the broad central belt of hilly country from West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha on the east through central India, to the upland parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra on the west.

Tribal people are not a homogeneous category; rather, they form an extremely heterogeneous population group. Classification attempts have revolved around their geographical location, ethnic and linguistic identities, occupational patterns and their levels of integration with the non-tribal neighbourhood. They are distinct from the dominant societies as they have distinctive traditions, distinct culture and unique approaches towards land, life and religion.

Ever since the British days, tribal people have suffered persistent alienation in terms of the traditional forest and land rights that they had enjoyed through generations. Constitutional provisions, statutory enactments and administrative rules have been introduced in independent India for the betterment of the conditions of the tribes, and Commissions and Committees have been plentiful. But the gaps and discrepancies have been many.

Pushed to the fringes by mainstream Indian society, members of the tribal communities continue to suffer extreme poverty which in turn leads to the related problems of indebtedness, bonded labour, educational backwardness and exclusion from decision-making processes at different levels. Like the labour of the low castes and women, their labour too gets persistently extracted below value by mainstream society.

6.7 Ambedkar Equal Spacing on Indian Society

B.R. Ambedkar [1891-1956] introduced an altogether new dimension of subaltern analyses of Indian society. Born in an untouchable Mahar family, having experienced the trauma of untouchability from an early age, Ambedkar's critique of Indian Hindu society was indeed passionate. His primary goal was to see the establishment of social justice in India; and, for that, eradication of the existing caste based stratification system was imperative.

In a couple of his unpublished manuscripts 'Revolution and Counter-revolution in Ancient India' and 'The Untouchables: Children of India's Ghettos', Ambedkar attempted to theoretically present the framework of the origin of caste in India. In the course of his analysis, Ambedkar firmly rejected the Aryan theory of caste. In his opinion, the Aryans were not a race; they were a collection of people held together by their interest in the maintenance of a type of culture called Aryan culture.

In 'Revolution and Counter-revolution in Ancient India', Ambedkar observed that there has never been a common Indian culture. Historically, there have been three

Indias – Brahminic India, Buddhist India and Hindu India, each with its own culture. He further urged that it should be recognized that the history of India prior to British invasions is the history of a mortal conflict between Brahminism and Buddhism. In his *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar observed that the higher caste Hindus deliberately prevented the lower castes, who were within the pale of Hinduism, from rising to the cultural level of the higher castes.

Ambedkar noted that “The structure of Indian Society is characterized by an order of ascending reverence and descending contempt”. It is not only divided into numerous groups, but also stratified on the basis of caste and class. Untouchability arose through the breaking up of tribes in ancient wars. When a tribe no longer had enough members to be a tribe, its remnants were ‘broken men’ and were compelled to live outside the walls of villages and towns, doing unclean works and enduring the insult and torture of the unbroken .

A critique of the Hindu philosophy and society was attempted by him in several of his writings. He either concentrated solely on developing a critique of Hinduism or took it up as part of a wider project. The *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *Revolution and Counter-revolution*, *Riddles of Hinduism* were just some of the many places in which he critiqued Hinduism. The core of the Hindu scheme of governance, he noted, is enshrined in a written constitution and anyone who cares to know it will find it laid bare in that sacred book called the *Manu Smriti*, a divine code which lays down the rules which govern the religious, ritualistic and social life of the Hindus in minute detail and which must be regarded as the Bible of the Hindus and containing the philosophy of Hinduism.” This Hinduism he attempted to test against the yardstick of utility and justice and found that it failed both the tests. Justice, Ambedkar pointed out, is simply another name for liberty, equality and fraternity. But, in Hinduism “you will find both social inequality and religious inequality”. [“Philosophy of Hinduism” *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol. 3, p. 36.]. By denying social equality and economic security Hinduism, he showed, denies liberty. Hinduism fails even the test of fraternity as fraternity can arise only where there is a sentiment of fellow feeling and with the existence of nearly two to three thousand castes this sentiment cannot grow. As for utility, he noted that the very structure and ideology of caste destroyed social utility and by denying justice, Hinduism *ipso facto* denied utility. “How”, he asked “can a philosophy which dissects society in fragments, which dissociates work from interest, which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the right of man to interests vital to life and which prevented society from mobilising resources for common action in the hour of danger, be said to satisfy the test of Social Utility”.

Ambedkar presents a concise summing up of the ill-effects of the caste system in his 'Annihilation of Caste'. These may be noted as follows –

1. The effect of caste on the ethics of Hindus is simply deplorable
2. Caste has killed public spirit.
3. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity.
4. Caste has made public opinion impossible.
5. Virtue has become caste ridden.
6. Morality has become caste bound.
7. There is no sympathy for the deserving.
8. There is no appreciation of the meritorious.
9. There is no charity to the needy.
10. Suffering as such calls for no response.
11. There is charity, but it begins with caste and ends with caste; there is sympathy, but not for men of other castes.

Ambedkar strongly felt that this social order needed to be changed. Without changing it, little progress could be achieved. Nothing could be built on the foundations of caste. Put in his own words, 'anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack, and will never be a whole.' [Annihilation of Caste]. Thus was felt the urgency of transforming society. While caste was primarily a feature of Hindu society, in Ambedkar's opinion, it had infected everybody including the Sikhs, Muslims and Christians.

To Ambedkar, untouchability, inseparably linked to caste, was not simply a religious issue; it was an economic issue that was in essence worse than a system of slavery. 'In slavery' he pointed out, 'the master at any rate had the responsibility to feed, clothe and house the slave and keep him in good condition lest the market value of the slave should decrease. But in the system of untouchability prevalent in India the Hindu takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchable. As an economic system it permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation'. The overall economics of caste and untouchability was thus explained by Ambedkar, particularly in two of his works, namely, *Annihilation of Castes* and *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To the Untouchables*.

In his challenge of the Brahminical society, Ambedkar was concerned also with the plight of women in India. In August 1947, Ambedkar had become law minister in the first cabinet of independent India. As law minister, one of the major initiatives taken by him towards reforming the Hindu social order was in the form of drafting the Hindu Code Bill which inter alia, was primarily aimed at enhancing gender equality in Hindu society. According to its main provisions, daughters as well as sons were to get a share of inheritance upon the death of their parents, widows were granted absolute estate, monogamy was a rule of law and divorce was permitted under certain circumstances. After repeated attempts and lengthy discussions on the bill that took place in Parliament, in the face of stiff orthodox resistance, the bill was abandoned and in protest Ambedkar resigned from the ministry in 1951.

Towards the last phase of his life, Ambedkar seems to have lost faith in the working of the Constitution that he had taken such pains to draft. The paradigm of social integration and the nation state that was slowly evolving through the contending forces of the national movement appeared to suffer a setback. Ambedkar had felt and articulated the importance of socio-economic democracy as a pre-requisite of political democracy in India; yet, as the low castes and other marginalized groups continued to suffer from their social, cultural and economic bondage Ambedkar's dreams were hard hit.

In a final and decisive rejection of the Hindu Brahminical order of society, Ambedkar turned to Buddhism, where, in sharp contrast to Hinduism, the Buddhist 'dhamma' he felt provided the ideal values for inter-individual relationships premised on dignity and equality.

6.8 Social Change in India

As in the case of every other society, Indian society too has undergone changes over time. The pace of change has been varied, just as the directions of change have been diverse. Changes have affected, inter alia, the village community, caste, family, marriage and gender relations. Various theories and an enormous amount of literature have come up to explain the nature of the changes. Indian sociological formulations of the concepts of social change began with the writings of British and Indian scholars since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In course of time a variety of approaches emerged. These were classified as 1]. Evolutionary approaches, 2]

cultural approaches: sanskritisation –westernisation, little and great tradition, and multiple traditions,3] structural approaches: differentiation and mobility analysis, dialectical-historical approaches, cognitive historical approach, and institutional approach.

6.9 Conclusion

Indian society has a long history covering a span of several thousand years. Over that period, several waves of immigrants, representing different ethnic strains and linguistic families merged into its population thereby contributing to its diversity, richness and vitality.

Indian society is marked by inherent structural inequality that has evolved over thousands of years in this region. The brahminical system ,as it is referred to in common parlance, has made for a hierarchy of privileges, power, status and authority. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy have suffered generations of social exclusion, economic marginalization and overall denial of power. They include those sections of the population whom we today know as the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities and women.

The Indian Republic and the nation emerged after independence with the vision of integration of the diverse communities into the frame of a plural society. Yet, as the socially legitimized inequalities persisted the vision of integrated development remained elusive. Large sections of the population continued to suffer exclusion from goods and services.

This exclusion of certain sections of the population from equal opportunities is a major blot on Indian society. It is a shocking violation of human rights and an outright negation of the basic principles of democracy. It thwarts the economic growth of the country and makes for unhealthy political practices.

Changes have no doubt taken place over the years. They are reflected in many significant social and cultural aspects. They find reflection in consumption patterns, lifestyle and aspirations. Nonetheless, caste and community identity still remain the dominant social identities through which the vast majority of Indians continue to articulate their social intercourse and mediate their social, political and cultural goals.

6.10 Summing Up

- Indian society has been very complex with the existence of diverse population groups in the region. Yet, within the frame of diversity, the dominance of the brahminical social order, subscribed to by mainstream Hindu society, is clearly evident.
- This accounts for the continued subordination of large sections of the population on grounds of low caste status and gender.
- Ambedkar's opposition to it was strong as he set the tone for future struggles against the system. It was revealed both through his writings and his activism.

6.11 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Give an overview of the evolution of Indian society during British rule.
2. Discuss Ambedkar's vision of Indian society.
3. Discuss, following Ambedkar's ideas, the adverse effects of caste stratification in Indian society.
4. Give an outline of Ambedkar's critique of Hindu philosophy.
5. Explain how social stratification in India affects nation building.
6. Discuss the different approaches to the changes that have affected Indian society.

B. Short Questions :

1. What was the scenario of the region that is today known as India, prior to the arrival of the British ?
2. Describe the nature of Brahminical culture.
3. Why did Ambedkar consider social change to be important ?

B. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Indian society is stratified along—

Answer Options:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| (a) Class lines | (b) Caste lines |
| (c) Religious lines | (d) None |

Ans. (b)

2. Who coined the term 'sanskritization'?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| (a) G. S. Ghurye | (b) S.C. Dube |
| (c) M. N. Srinivas | (d) None |

Ans. (c)

3. Who wrote, 'Philosophy of Hinduism'?

Answer Options:

- (a) Rabindra Nath Tagore (b) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
(c) M. K. Gandhi (d) None

Ans. (a)

4. In which year did Ambedkar become the Law Minister in Nehru's cabinet?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1946 (b) 1947
(c) 1950 (d) 1951

Ans. (d)

5. Who wrote the book, 'Indian Society'?

Answer Options:

- (a) G. S. Ghurye (b) N. N. Srinivas
(c) S. C. Dube (d) None

Ans. (c)

6.12 Further Reading

1. B.R.Ambedkar, "Philosophy of Hinduism" *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol. 3
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3. David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, Sage, New Delhi, 2016.
4. S.C.Dube, *Indian Society*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1990.
5. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith translated, *The Laws of Manu*, Penguin, 1991
6. Yogendra Singh, *Social Stratification and Social Change in India*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1997.
7. B.R.Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, the annotated critical edition, edited by S.Anand, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013.

Keywords: Stratification, caste, gender, tribe, social change, Brahminical society, Hindu Code Bill.

Unit - 7 □ Caste, Adivasi And Minorities

Structure

7.1 Objective

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Caste

7.3.1 Features of the System

7.3.2 Origin of the Caste System

7.3.3 Ambedkar's Critique of Caste Society and his Notion of 'Broken Men'

7.4 Adivasis

7.4.1 The Pre-Independence Scenario

7.4.2 Tribal Policy of Independent India

7.4.3 The Anguish of the Adivasis

7.4.4 Ambedkar's analysis of the Adivasis

7.5 Minorities

7.5.1 Who is a Minority ?

7.5.2 Minority Woes

7.5.3 Minorities in British India

7.5.4. Ambedkar on Minorities

7.6 Conclusion

7.7 Summing Up

7.8 Probable Questions

7.9 Further Reading

7.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand -

- the nature of Indian society
- the nature of caste stratification in India
- ideas regarding the origin of caste stratification of Indian society
- ambedkar's notion of 'Broken Men'.
- the factors that led to marginalization of the tribes in India
- ambedkar's ideas on tribes
- who is a minority
- the minority situation in British India
- Ambedkar's perspective on minorities.

7.2 Introduction

During the days of British rule in India, the seeds of nationhood had been sown and its emergence in a rudimentary form was evident. Its basis was on the one hand, to be found in the technological revolution introduced by the British, and on the other hand in the common nationalist consciousness against alien rule. Yet, at no points of time were the bonds of unity strong enough to wipe out the many and diverse group loyalties that fragmented the people. Thus, on the eve of independence, even as nationality formation was under way, a mature national identity of the Indian people remained elusive. After more than half a century of independence, the persistence of the problems of fragmented allegiance remain frustrating.

7.3 Caste

The Indian Statutory Commission had noted in its Report in 1930 that 'Every Hindu necessarily belongs to the caste of his parents and in that caste he necessarily remains. No accumulation of wealth and no exercise of talents can alter his caste status.' [Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930, Vol.1, Ch. IV]. Hindu society is thus marked by a unique stratification system based on caste identity that has evoked keen interest among historians, analysts and observers. The divisions and

sub-divisions of caste are however extremely complex, thus making an understanding of Indian society difficult. The outlines of the system are to be found in the social frame laid down in the ancient scriptures adhered to by Hindu society, though the ground realities are greatly and diversely shaped by regional variations, historical conditions and customary practices.

7.3.1 Features of the System

Considering the complexity of the caste system together with the fact that it has evolved through ages responding to situational conditions, listing the salient features remains difficult as several prominent features of the system have over time receded into the background making way for others. However, six outstanding features of caste society that were identified by G.S.Ghurye in *Caste and Race in India*, first published in 1932, still remain relevant. These include [1] segmental division of society, [2] hierarchy, [3] restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, [4] civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections, [5] lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and [6] restrictions on marriage. Central to caste ideology have been the concepts of purity and pollution. The idea is that the purity of certain castes are to be preserved as against the polluting influence of others that are situated lower down in the hierarchy. This necessitates endogamy and the many social strictures elaborated in the caste rules. In its extreme form, it makes for untouchability, where any form of contact with members of the so-called untouchable castes are seen as polluting. Traditionally, castes were kept in their place by a combination of factors such as – religious and moral sanctions, division of labour, kinship affiliations, physical force and political authority.

7.3.2 Origin of the Caste System

The origin of the caste system has remained shrouded in obscurity. Several conflicting theories have been put forward by both Indian and western scholars seeking to delve into its roots.

The traditional religious theory of caste, or the theory of divine origin, was propounded in the Hindu scriptures which traced the origins of the system to the creation of God. According to it, the creator, the Purusha, created the four varnas, namely the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras from the different parts of his body, his mouth, arms, thigh and feet respectively. While the theory can hardly claim any scientific authenticity, the caste system derived much of its social legitimacy from it.

The Triguna theory of varna has also been one of the projected theories, devoid of scientific justification. Its suggested basis was that the different Varna classifications reflected the different inherent qualities of human beings.

More recent and scientifically researched attempts to trace the roots of the caste system bring us to the racial theory, the occupational theory and the economic interpretation of the origin of caste.

The racial theory sought to establish that the caste system emerged from the attempts of the intruding Aryans to maintain their purity of their faith and blood as against that of the aboriginal tribes.

Exponents of the occupational theory, on the other hand, argue that caste originated in the division of labour and the specialization of various functions in society. Amongst its prominent exponents were Denzil Ibbetson and J.C.Nesfield.

The economic interpretation of the origin of the caste system largely identified caste with class, emphasizing the class content of caste stratification. D.D.Kosambi's name comes up in this context.

While the four-fold classification of Hindu society along Varna lines is widely alluded to, the ground realities of caste classification indicate the existence of innumerable jatis across the country.

7.3.3 Ambedkar's Critique of Caste Society and his notion of 'Broken Men'

Ambedkar was extremely critical of the caste based stratification system prevalent in Indian Hindu society. While initially he hoped to remedy Hindu society of this vice, he soon came to realize its futility. Thereafter his struggle, focused on the ultimate goal of annihilation of caste, entailed a total rejection of Hinduism.

His detailed investigation of caste began early and he wrote 'Castes in India:

Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', a paper presented at an Anthropology Seminar at Columbia University on 9th May 1916. Therein he regarded endogamy as the key to the mystery of the caste system.

In *The Untouchables, who were they and why they became Untouchables?* (1948), Ambedkar refuted the racial theory of caste. He argued that all primitive societies have been one day or the other conquered by invaders who raised themselves above the native tribes. The process of breaking up of these tribes, as a matter of rule, gave birth to peripheral groups that he referred to as the *Broken Men*. Ambedkar argued that the Untouchables were the descendants of such Broken Men. According

to Ambedkar, these Broken Men were the most unwavering followers of Buddha. He argued that if the untouchables recognised themselves as sons of the soil and Buddhists, they could better surmount their divisions into so many jatis and take a stand together as an ethnic group against the system in its entirety.

7.4 Adivasis

India has a rather large tribal population, referred to diversely as adivasis, adim jatis, aborigines. They account for a little over eight percent of the country's population as per the 2011 Census. However, it would be wrong to consider them as a homogenous category. They can be variedly described by reference to the region in which they reside, their racial stock, language, economic position, their extent of integration with the non-tribals and their overall cultural patterns and customs. Even as the tribes are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the country, in terms of their proportional concentration certain regions can be termed as 'tribal belts'.

7.4.1 The Pre-Independence Scenario

Prior to British rule in India, large areas had been under the effective control of the tribes and powerful tribal chiefs exercised their control over regions within their purview. Nature played an important role in their lives, as traditionally their relationship with nature was an integral relationship revolving around forests and land.

With the arrival of the British, this ecological balance of tribal life was severely jolted. The tribes lost their traditional rights in land and forests in face of British policy of widespread plunder. A series of tribal revolts, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, bore witness to the deep-seated discontent of the tribal population. There were clashes of economic interests as well as clashes of culture between the tribal and the non-tribal vested interests, bulwarked by the ruling authorities, who tended to lean on the educated and landed classes. British rulers clearly adopted a partisan role in the land grab that set in motion the process of widespread dislocation of the tribes from their traditional homesteads. With the introduction of the Forest Act 1878, subsequently amended in 1927, shifting cultivation, foraging, grazing and hunting were all banned, thereby eliminating the livelihoods of those living in and on the margins of the forests.

7.4.2 Tribal Policy Of Independent India

In independent India, the government policy in relation to the tribal population was officially guided by the principles enunciated by Jawaharlal Nehru: these indicated that—1. Tribal people should develop along the lines of their own genius, 2. Their rights in lands and forests should be protected. 3. Efforts should be made to train and build up a team of their own people to do work for administration and development. 4. over-administration of these areas should be avoided just as overwhelming them with a multiplicity of schemes should be avoided. 5. Results should be judged, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved. The Constitution of independent India incorporated special provisions for the advancement of the tribal-inhabited areas ; the tribes, placed under a ‘Schedule’ and designated as Scheduled Tribes, were entitled to a host of special benefits in the form of ‘reservations’ in relation to legislatures government services and educational facilities. As per the constitutional provisions, there is also a special officer designated as the Commissioner for Scheduled Tribes to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for them. Government schemes for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes have been of three broad categories. There are the centrally operated schemes, the centrally sponsored programmes and the state sector programmes.

7.4.3 The Anguish of the Adivasis

Yet, all said and done, the picture of tribal existence is anything but bright. Gaps exist at multiple levels. There are gaps between the constitutional provisions and statutory enactments and departmental rules, just as there are gaps between these and their implementation. Notwithstanding the government’s multiple protective schemes, the tribes have been steadily and persistently losing out on their traditional rights in relation to land and forests – their primary source of support. Alienation of tribal land has been continuing unabated; some of it is legal, much of it is illegal . Growing landlessness push many to work as agricultural labourers, under conditions that are hardly humane! Often, they are denied even the statutory minimum wages! Needless to say, the corollary of extreme poverty is indebtedness and it is but one step to bonded labour — a vicious circle that becomes almost impossible to break! Struggling for survival, a section of the tribal population moves into the orbit of industrial production. However, there too their conditions are hardly better. In most cases, the only employment that they can seek out is that of unskilled labour in the mines, factories, brick kilns and construction sites, working under contractors and as casual

labour, very often under coercive supervision of musclemen. Ironically, many industrial projects have sprung up on the lands that were formerly the homes of these tribal people ; lands from which they were ruthlessly evicted. The tribes are extremely low down in terms of the basic indicators of well-being - health, education and income. Rooted in a long history of indignity and marginalization, the threats to the existence of the vast majority have multiplied manifold in the wake of India's acceptance of neo-liberal policies since 1991. The reform process has adversely affected the economy, culture, languages and life style of the tribal people.

7.4.4 Ambedkar's analysis of the Adivasis

While Ambedkar was well informed about caste society, on the adivasi question he seemed more superficial, viewing them essentially through the lens of western liberalism. Ambedkar seems to have failed in coming to terms with the complexities of adivasi society adopting instead a rather paternalistic attitude similar to that of the European missionaries and liberal thinkers of the time, though at the same time he did note the marginality that the adivasis had been pushed into by Hindu society. Writing in *The Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar noted :

Thirteen million people living in the midst of civilization are still in a savage state, and are leading the life of hereditary criminals.... The Hindus will probably seek to account for this savage state of the aborigines by attributing to them congenital stupidity. They will probably not admit that the aborigines have remained savages because they made no effort to civilize them, to give them medical aid, to reform them, to make them good citizens....

Rather interestingly, Ambedkar proceeded to warn the Hindus that –

The Hindu has not realized that these aborigines are a source of potential danger. If these savages remain savages, they may not do any harm to the Hindus. But if they are reclaimed by non-Hindus and converted to their faiths, they will swell the ranks of the enemies of the Hindus.

While discussing the issue of proportionate representation , Ambedkar was not arguing for adivasi rights as he made it clear in a 1945 address in Bombay [‘The Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve it’]. The reason cited was –

The aboriginal tribes have not as yet developed any political sense to make the best use of their political opportunities and they may easily become mere instruments in the hands either of a majority or a minority and thereby disturb the balance without doing any good to themselves.

7.5 Minorities

Hindus in India are the dominant majority, making up for around eighty percent of the population. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains are amongst the prominent minority communities. Of them, Muslims are the largest minority group in the country, accounting for around 14.2 percent of the total population as per the 2011 census.

7.5.1 Who is a Minority ?

The Indian Constitution uses the word “minority” and its plural forms in several of its articles, but does not proceed to define it. One can nevertheless infer from Articles 29 and 30 read together that the term primarily refers to religious and linguistic minorities.

Article 29 of the Constitution provides for —

Protection of interests of minorities

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 30 of the Constitution speaks of – Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

On the whole, it can be asserted that India's Constitution encompasses provisions that emphasize complete legal equality of its citizens regardless of their religion or creed, and prohibits any kind of religion-based discrimination. It also provides safeguards—albeit limited ones—to religious minority communities.

The Constitution has several in-built legal safeguards for the minorities. Articles 15(1) and 15(2) prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion. Article 25 promises the right to profess, propagate and practise religion. Further, it is clear that there is no legal bar on any religious community in India in making use of the opportunities [educational, economic, etc.] extended to the people in general.

7.5.2 Minority Woes

Despite the various constitutional legal safeguards, a number of problems afflict the religious minorities. These problems range from discrimination faced by them in their everyday life to their forced conversions; other constraints faced by members of these communities include problems of poverty and the overall feeling of alienation that has engulfed them.

Some of the main problems faced by minorities in India can be categorized under the following heads: 1. Problem of identity 2. Problem of security 3. Problem relating to equity. They increasingly feel alienated from the society at large, due to the deprivation faced by them as a direct result of discrimination. This has produced an acute impact on the social and economic life of the members of the minority communities.

Deprivation of job opportunities, lack of representation in the civil service and politics, and limited access to quality education have led the members of some of these communities to struggle for maintaining minimum standards of living.

The issue of identity is important. The minority communities have felt disoriented and displaced due to their fear of being engulfed by the overwhelming majority. They feel a constant threat of losing their own identity to the majority religious community.

7.5.3 Minorities in British India:

British colonial policy vis-à-vis the minorities had hardly been uniform, evolving gradually and changing according to the exigencies of the situation and the demands

of colonial politics. Dealing with the Muslim situation was perhaps the most complicated of the issues at the time. The divide and rule policy of the British rulers, the Hindu overtone of the nationalist movement, the rapidly deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations and the holocaust of the Partition amidst communal carnage generated a bitter memory of mistrust and hatred amongst the communities the effects of which were felt in post-independence India.

7.5.4. Ambedkar on Minorities:

Ambedkar insisted that the Depressed Classes be treated as minorities, alongside the other categories. In 1942 Ambedkar presented a memorandum to the then Viceroy setting out the Scheduled Castes demands for representation in assemblies, the administration and the educational system. In order to ensure that the untouchables got greater recruitment opportunities in the administration, Ambedkar demanded that they be categorized as minorities, just like the Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, Sikhs and Parsis who were granted, in 1934, quotas in the main administrative departments.

Ambedkar was deeply concerned about the minorities. As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian **Constitution**, Ambedkar strongly argued for minority rights when the Constituent Assembly discussed the interim report on Fundamental Rights on May 1, 1947. "Rights for minorities should be absolute rights. They should not be subject to any consideration as to what another party may like to do to minorities within its jurisdiction," Ambedkar said in 1947. He further noted that while the government could diplomatically engage with neighbours for rights to minorities there, he wasn't in favour of this affecting their rights here.

Ambedkar was always apprehensive of the communal majority capturing state power. Reflecting on 'minority questions', Ambedkar argued that if the communal majority rather than secular majority captures 'state power' then it is imperative for the democratic state to develop a certain institutional mechanism to safeguard the rights of religious and social minorities. The very aim of democratic politics, as Ambedkar believed, is to overcome the gap between the majority and minority communities.

In 1945 Ambedkar's *States and Minorities* was first published. Ambedkar wrote the book on the request, and on behalf of the Scheduled Caste Federation which was an organisation that he himself had founded in the early 1940s. In 1947 he submitted the book to the Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights of the Constituent Assembly of India. It may be noted that the Sub-Committee, of which Ambedkar himself was a member, had been entrusted by the Assembly to draw up a list of Fundamental

Rights for the Constitution of India. For Ambedkar, the question of minority representation was vital.

7.6 Conclusion

Amongst the most marginalized sections of India are those who are at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, the tribes and the minorities. The roots of their predicaments can be traced back to the long past. In the post-independence era, the constitutional safeguards and laws have brought promises of improvement in their conditions; however, even after seventy years of independence the problems remain unresolved. In this situation, looking back to Ambedkar's ideas are important. He played a crucial role in the drafting of the Constitution, had clear and unique perspectives for improving the conditions of the marginal sections and for the overall democratisation of India, even though he did not succeed in getting many of his ideas accepted.

7.7 Summing Up

- Indian society is stratified along caste lines. Its roots go back to the period of the ancient Vedic literature. This is a system of graded inequality, as pointed out by Ambedkar.
- From the theoretical exposition of varnas, we today have the ground realities of the presence of hundreds of jatis.
- Due to the prevalence of this system, the low castes, tribes and minorities all suffer not only from socio-economic marginalization, but also persistent indignity.
- B.R.Ambedkar had elaborately presented his theoretical analyses of caste-based Hindu society. While his exploration of the issue of tribes was limited, he revealed keen interest in the minority question. He demanded that the untouchable castes, i.e. the Depressed Classes as they were called, be treated en masse as minorities and minority rights be extended to them.
- Despite certain remedial steps inserted in several provisions of the Constitution, the problems generated by caste stratification continue to plague Indian society even today.

7.8 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Attempt an analysis of Ambedkar's critique of caste society in India.
2. What was Ambedkar's view regarding the Adivasis of India ?
3. Discuss the position of minorities in India.
4. Identify the main features of the caste system in India.
5. Who, in Ambedkar's view, were the untouchables ?
6. What has been the Government's policy regarding the tribal population in independent India ?

B. Short Questions :

1. How are caste norms enforced ?
2. How, according to Ambedkar, would conversion of Adivasis to other religions, affect the Hindus ?
3. Why did Ambedkar want the Depressed Classes to be treated as minorities?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Varna system is based on—

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (a) Two-fold classification | (b) Three-fold classification |
| (c) Four-fold classification | (d) None |

Ans. (c)

2. Who is the author of the book, "Caste and Race in India"?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| (a) M.N.Srinivas | (b) G.S.Ghurye |
| (c) A.R.Desai | (d) B.R.Ambedkar |

Ans. (b)

3. In which year was the Forest Act passed?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1860 | (b) 1865 |
| (c) 1870 | (d) 1878 |

Ans. (d)

4. The government policy on tribal population in independent India was officially guided by principles enunciated by—

Answer Options:

- (a) Motilal Nehru (b) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
(c) Jawharlal Nehru (d) Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Ans. (c)

5. In which year was Ambedkar's 'States and Minorities' published?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1940 (b) 1945
(c) 1946 (d) 1948

Ans. (b)

7.9 Further Reading

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Unit - 8 □ Women's Question

Structure

- 8.1 Objective**
- 8.2 Introduction**
- 8.3 Brahminical system and women's oppression**
- 8.4 Aspects of Rights Violations**
- 8.5 Early Struggles for Women's Empowerment**
- 8.6 The Women's Question in Phule-Ambedkar Tradition**
- 8.7 Periyar and the Women's Issue**
- 8.8 Feminist Movement and Dalit Women's Concerns**
- 8.9 Conclusion**
- 8.10 Summary**
- 8.11 Probable Questions**
- 8.12 Further Reading**

8.1 Objective

On going through this Unit the learners will be able to understand -

- the nature of women's oppression in India
- the constitutional –legal frame for ensuring women's rights
- the evolution of the women's movement in India
- Phule's role in the uplift of women
- Ambedkar's contribution towards women empowerment
- E.V.Ramaswami's stand on women's issues
- facets of contemporary struggles of dalit women

8.2 Introduction

In independent India the Constitution granted equality to women as a fundamental right. It empowered the state to adopt affirmative discrimination in favour of women. The Constitution assured equal protection of the law, equal opportunities in public employment and prohibited discrimination in public places. As universal adult suffrage added women to the electoral rolls making them politically relevant, political parties pledged their commitment to women's issues. A series of laws were passed since the nineteen fifties aiming at greater empowerment of women.

Yet, women's discrimination remains sanctified by tradition. Religion continues to prop up the image of the docile woman dedicated to the unstinting, selfless service of the family. Patriarchy thrives comfortably, couched in religious jargon with Brahminism propagating the notion that women are incapable of functioning as independent entities. By the introduction of universal adult suffrage under the Constitution of independent India women got the right to vote on equal terms with men - a right which in many of the western countries women won after prolonged struggles. But nevertheless, women's representation in legislative bodies remained poor.

In 1971, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare appointed a committee under the Chairpersonship of Dr Phulrenu Guha, the then Union Minister for Social Welfare, 'to examine the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions that have a bearing on the social status of women, their education and employment, ' and to assess the impact of these provisions. The move came in response to a UN request to all countries to prepare reports on the status of women for the International Women's Year scheduled for 1975. The Report of the Committee was published in 1974. The findings were startling. The Indian government's commitment to equality was seriously challenged in that Report titled *Towards Equality*. The Report was the first major work to point out the extent to which constitutional guarantees of equality and justice had not been met for women. The authors of the Report charged that women's status had not improved but had in fact declined since independence. The Report noted that social change and development in India had adversely affected women.

8.3 Brahminical System and Women's Oppression

Despite legal and administrative measures adopted over a period of nearly seventy years in independent India, women still remain subject to patriarchal oppression. The fact is that the rights guaranteed have failed to ensure the requisite social justice. It

is here that a closer perusal of the social structure helps us in understanding the depths of the problem.

The history of women's oppression in India can hardly be comprehended without reference to the fact that the hierarchies of gender intersect with hierarchies of caste, class and ethnicity in the most complex fashion in India. Over thousands of years, in the region today known as India, the Brahminical system of social structuring has developed leading to a rigid social hierarchy rooted in the basic Hindu texts, stigmatising and marginalising a large section of the population. Just as on the one hand, the marginalised include the non-Hindus and the low castes, on the other hand all women are marginalised, and visualised as equivalent to the low Sudra castes. The Brahminical system's degraded scheme of purity and pollution required as its supporting pillar the complete control over female sexuality which resulted in the perpetual subordination of women.

8.4 Aspects of Rights Violations

Inequality that impinges on women's lives becomes evident from many angles. It is reflected in issues such as denial of access to productive resources, absence of right of control of women over their own bodies and persistent violence which women experience virtually from conception till death. Violence in fact remains central to the reproduction of patriarchy and, in India patriarchy is deeply shaped by caste. In rural areas, women's access to health, education, capital, technology and land continue to remain severely limited and much of women's work is unpaid family labour which hardly gets any recognition as work. In urban areas, eve teasing, sexual harassment at the work place, female foeticide, dowry deaths are just some of the unending pains inflicted on the woman.

Violence has remained impregnated in India's development policy. The strategy of industrial development with its emphasis on labour saving and skill intensive technology has displaced women from traditional occupations, self employment, small scale and cottage industries as also from large scale industries. Increasingly, women are denied access to Common Property Resources such as forests and grazing grounds on the pretext of environmental protection while at the same time those resources are made easily available to big industries, particularly the MNCs, for purposes of commercial exploitation. Big dams and other environmental policies, India's nuclear programme, all pose serious threats to women and not surprisingly some of the most vocal protests come from women themselves.

Today, in the post-90s, with the introduction of structural adjustments, the targeting of production for the global market, opening up of the economy to other states as part of globalisation and with the virtual acceptance of market forces as the sole determinant of economic and other activities, and the state's withdrawal from its role of social welfare agency by the encouragement of privatisation on the one hand and reduction of budget allocations on health - education - and social services on the other have adversely affected Indian women. Much of what was achieved during the earlier decades appears to be under serious stress since the nineties. The alarming rise of female foeticide, girl child abuse, incidents of rape and domestic violence and dowry demands signal the growing threat. Women find themselves at odds in trying to cope with the demands of new skills in the job market made necessary by globalisation. The rising threat of unemployment looms large and the pressure of the market all but crushes them. Skirting the labour laws, work of the big industries gets done contractually by small home based units with total disregard to working conditions, hours of work etc on the one hand, and on the other the women working in the traditional small industries increasingly lose their sources of livelihood. On the whole, the implications of the Structural Adjustment Programmes have been negative for most women. For them, it has meant reduced real incomes and standards of living along with greater burden of unpaid work. In a word, under globalisation, feminisation of poverty takes place as never before.

Amongst the worst off, are the dalit women. Caught in the trap between gender and caste, their vulnerability is unique. They are victims of structural violence entrenched by patriarchy and the brahminical ethos. Their vulnerability is exposed at different levels and in different forms. They suffer low educational levels, economic deprivation, nutritional and other health-related deficiencies, high unemployment and physical violence, ritual prostitution, trafficking and rape, alongside overall indignity and stigma.

8.5 Early Struggles for Women's Empowerment

The nationalist struggle in India did provide women with certain opportunities of entering the public sphere. This brought about certain changes in their lives, but could not totally transform the reality. The chains of tradition could not be broken. The basic question of women's inequality and the traditional role of the woman were not challenged. In fact, in the surge of the nationalist struggle, women's issues and movements were pushed into the background; the idea being that they would be considered later after the issue of independence was settled. Yet, women's organizations

in pre-independence days did raise and articulate women's demands for a host of rights. The main concerns raised during the period related to a) the demand for franchise – a demand which was raised as early as in the second decade of the twentieth century by some elite women, and b) the Hindu Code Bill in support of which women's organizations worked hard to mobilize public opinion.

It is however pertinent to note that some of the most powerful pro-women themes and actions in India came not so much from the ranks of the nationalist movement or upper caste moderate social reformers, but more so from the side of the radical anti-caste leaders of the non-Brahmin and dalit movements such as Jotirao Phule, B.R.Ambedkar and E.V.Ramasami as they were in a better position to challenge the combined forces of caste and patriarchal oppression.

8.6 The Women's question in the Phule-Ambedkar tradition

In the 19th century, social reformers were seen taking up women's concerns. It was however, the upper caste male reformers who were prominent in this field. They were working broadly within the frame of tradition, redefining it and recasting women rather than contesting Brahminical patriarchy as such. In the Phule-Ambedkar tradition there developed an altogether different formulation of the women's question.

Jotirao Phule was a non-Brahmin leader of Maharashtra. He was born in a lower caste Mali family in Maharashtra in 1827. Critical of the caste system and women's subordinate status imposed by the Brahminical system, Jotirao Phule, actively supported by his wife Savitribai, came forth to be one of the pioneers of women's education in India. He is considered as one of the most prominent personalities who brought social reforms in Maharashtra. Jotirao Phule adopted a far more radical position on gender than his contemporaries. He rejected Brahminism and the ideology of Brahminical patriarchy altogether. Phule's negation of Brahminical Hinduism and the caste system was so complete that he negated the structure of gender relations built into it, based as it was on caste purity and hence upon repressive sexual codes for women. Phule's critique of Brahminism and Brahminical patriarchy was not only confined to his writings; rather, he made conscious attempts to practice an egalitarian relationship within the family.

Tarabai Shinde's now famous essay on "Stree-Purush Tulana" ("A Comparison of Men and Women") was first published as a booklet in 1882. That was almost a century before the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Tarabai had inherited the revolutionary social tradition of critiquing Brahminical hegemony which

flourished under the leadership of Jotirao Phule (1827 – 1890). Her work was undoubtedly an extremely original and brilliant critique of patriarchal oppression far ahead of her times. It is in all likelihood, the first fully worked out analysis of the ideological fabric of Hindu patriarchal society. Shinde had written the piece in response to an article that had been published in *Pune Vaibhav* relating to a hotly discussed incident whereby a young widow had been sentenced to death by the court for committing infanticide. The article published in the *Pune Vaibhav* had made a vicious attack on the concerned woman and women in general for their ‘modernistic’ and ‘loose’ morality. Tarabai refuted each and every argument in her writing and demonstrated how men are invariably the perpetrators of the vices which they so often locate in women.

The critique of Brahminical patriarchy was carried further ahead by B.R. Ambedkar [1891-1956]. In the Ambedkar movement, women had played important roles. At the time of the historic Mahad Satyagraha (1927), which involved a historic effort to get water from a public pond after the Bombay Legislative Council had declared all public places open to untouchables, women participated in large numbers in the procession from the conference site to the pond in question. They also took part in the deliberations of the subject committee meetings in the passing of resolutions about the claims for equal human rights. At the time of the Kalaram Satyagraha launched in Nasik in 1930 which was undertaken by the marginalized castes under the leadership of Ambedkar for gaining access to the premises of the Kalaram temple, women were seen to be participating in hundreds.

Ambedkar, while organizing conferences of the untouchables, saw to it that simultaneously women’s conferences too were held. By the 1930s dalit women were seen to be organizing meetings independently. Women’s conferences were held, inter alia, in Nagpur (1942), Kanpur (1944), Bombay (1945) and Calcutta (1946). Women leaders at such conferences included Minambal Shivraj, Sulochana Dongre, Shantabai Dani and Radhabai Kamble. In the Resolutions that were adopted at the different conferences, the demands included free and compulsory education for girls, women’s representation in the legislative bodies, prohibition of child marriages, reform of the marriage system and rescuing women from prostitution. Yet, while different aspects of Ambedkar’s ideas and movements have come into focus, his gender sensitivity and the role played by women in the movement have remained sidelined over the years. Only recently, it was brought into focus by the research undertaken by Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar which was published in 1989

under the caption, “We Made History Too”. The work was in Marathi and first published from Pune.

At the time of the 1942 Women’s Conference during the Scheduled Caste Federation meeting, Ambedkar’s advice to the women as reported by Dhananjay Keer , his biographer, was significant. The advice that Ambedkar gave to women on the occasion included injunctions to educate their children and remove from them any inferiority complex; not to have too many children; and to let every girl who marries “claim to be her husband’s friend and equal and to refuse to be his slave”[Keer, p. 352].

Ambedkar’s ideas and movements impacted on Indian women’s lives in several ways. First, his movements and organizations encouraged many dalit women to gain education and be active in public life, particularly joining organizations for dalit women at the national and state levels. Secondly, resulting from the growing sense of self respect, education and activism, a creative spirit amongst them was generated. The products of it were poetry, fiction and autobiographies written by dalit women. Third, Ambedkar’s concern for the status of all women was reflected in the Hindu Code Bill which, as first law minister, he sought to get passed in Parliament . Though he failed in his efforts due to strong orthodox resistance, it brought the issues into focus and the main provisions of the proposed Act were subsequently passed as separate Acts. Fourth, it was through his efforts that Maternity Benefit Act was first introduced in India in the province of Bombay. Fifth, he brought into focus the link between patriarchy and caste, drawing attention to the social system as a whole and the role of women.

8.7 Periyar and the Women’s Issue

Perhaps the most radical critique of patriarchy from an anti-Brahminical perspective in modern India was developed by E.V.Ramasami, better known as Periyar [1879-1973]. As he carried forward his crusade against the gods, priests and the Brahminical order through his *Cuyamariyadai* or Self Respect Movement in the first half of the twentieth century, he firmly stood for women’s rights. EVR, the name by which he was widely addressed, challenged the historical and mythological fallacies regarding the necessity of female subjugation. In doing so he rejected the conventional ideals pertaining to the feminine. He rejected the eulogizing of chastity and questioned the idealizing of motherhood and mothering. Parenthood, rather than motherhood was deemed to be the decisive factor in the nurture and care of human life.

Periyar succeeded in inspiring a committed band of Self Respecters to take up cudgels for women's emancipation and in favour of the Self Respect Marriages which he introduced. Over time, a large number of articles on these and related questions were published in the organs of the Self Respect Movement – *Kudi Arasu*, *Puratchi*, *Pagutharivu* and *Samadharmam*. Women themselves wrote enthusiastically about these matters. In many of these writings, even as common cause was made of the exploitation of all women, the particular concerns of the *adi dravida* women were not lost.

8.8 Feminist Movement and Dalit Women's Concerns

Early feminist scholarship, in India as elsewhere, was largely confined to the framework of the 'status of women' focusing on a limited set of concerns like property rights, marriage age, enforced widowhood, participation of women in rituals, etc. In India, the concerns were mainly or exclusively applicable to the upper caste women. Beginning in the 1930s some feminists critiqued the patriarchal state and family system. In the 1960s, dissatisfaction with the status quo led many women to join struggles of the rural poor and industrial working class. Participation of women in the Naxalbari movement, anti-price rise demonstrations, Navnirman Youth Movement in Gujarat and Bihar, the Chipko Movement all provided the backdrop for the later struggles on women's issues.

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s we find the emergence of a plethora of autonomous women's groups being formed. But, even as they linked with one another through their leaders, the feminist press, the general media's coverage of women's issues, meetings and conventions, they were not welded together through the structure of any formal organisation. In recent times we notice the spectrum widening to encompass a varied examination of the nature and basis of women's oppression. This women's movement continues to focus on traditional practices, beliefs and institutions as the source of oppression. It also brings into focus issues of violence against women, the institutional framework for the maintenance of gender differences and the economic situation of the day-to-day lives of women.

Since the 1980s dalit women have been struggling to get their voices heard in a manner distinct from dalit men and the mainstream women's movement. They started building their own networks separate from that of dalit men and the mainstream women's movement, laying the groundwork for the emergence of dalit

feminism. In 1987, the first national meeting of dalit women was held in Bangalore. A leading role in initiating the move was taken by Ruth Manorama, a noted activist in the field. 1994 saw the formation of the All India Dalit Women's forum. In March 1994, a 'Public Hearing on Atrocities Against Dalits with Specific Reference to Dalit Women' was organized by Women's Voice, Bangalore, and Asian Women's Human Rights Council, Manila.

The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) was formed in 1995. In the same year of its formation, the NFDW participated in the Fourth UN International Women's Conference at Beijing. Among the hundreds of women who attended the Conference from India, dalit women were well represented.

In November 2006, an international conference on Dalit Women's Rights was held in Hague, Netherlands. It was the first international conference of its kind. Dalit women from across the world assembled at the Conference to share their experiences and views. The Conference was jointly organized by a number of NGOs including Justitia et Pax, Cordaid, CMC (Mensen met een Missie), Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN) and National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR - India).

8.9 Conclusion

Ever since independence, over the years, issues pertaining to women's rights have been the concern of administrators, law-makers, social reformers and welfare bodies. Non-governmental organizations today have made their presence felt in several areas of women's concerns. The emphasis however, continues to remain essentially piecemeal, with the focus being on economic betterment, health and education related matters.

The political parties have in turn focused on issues of women's political rights and legal safeguards for women in multiple fields. The larger parties even have their own women's wings. These, however, mainly work towards mobilizing women for the implementation of the overall agenda of the party rather than for any comprehensive strategy for women's empowerment. Even where women's issues are considered, the attention is on piecemeal reforms or protest against individual instances of injustice. Addressing the wider issue in terms of its deeper roots i.e., countering women's oppression that is located in the combined frame of Brahminism and patriarchy, is yet to take well-defined shape.

8.10 Summing Up

- In India, women have, since ancient times, suffered patriarchal oppression. Women's marginalization has been sanctified by the patriarchal and brahminical social system. Legal constitutional rights have so far failed to ensure social justice for them. Alongside, protesting against oppression, have developed many strands of struggles for recognition of women's rights. The early reform movements of the nineteenth century largely spearheaded by men were followed by the emergence of women's autonomous movements, and the subsequent feminist struggles.
- The mainstream nationalist leaders in India had, for a variety of reasons, given only limited and piecemeal attention to the women's question. The most powerful pro-women themes and actions in modern India came up not so much from the ranks of the nationalist movement or upper caste moderate social reformers, but more from the side of the radical anti-caste leaders of the non-Brahmin and dalit movements such as Jotirao Phule, B.R.Ambedkar and E.V.Ramasami, as they challenged the combined forces of caste and patriarchal oppression.
- While the mainstream feminist movement till the 1980s failed to reckon with the uniqueness of the dalit women's situation, dalit women were seen to raise their own voices in favour of recognition of their situation, leading to the emergence of dalit feminism.

8.11 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Discuss the nature of women's marginalization in India.
2. In what ways did Ambedkar contribute to the uplift of women in India ?
3. Analyse Periyar's views regarding the women's question.
4. Discuss the link between caste and gender exploitation in India.
5. Write a note on Phule's contribution towards gender justice.
6. Discuss how dalit women have sought to project their demands since the 1980s.

B. Short Questions :

1. How has globalization affected women's position in India ?
2. Explain the nature of women's participation in the Ambedkarite movement.
3. Write briefly about the Hague Conference of 2006.

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Who was the Chairperson of the committee set up by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in 1971?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) Sarojini Naidu | (b) Dr. Phulrenu Guha |
| (c) Dr. Amrita Kaur | (d) None |

Ans. (b)

2. Which year was declared as the International Women's Year?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1970 | (b) 1975 |
| (c) 1980 | (d) 1985 |

Ans. (b)

3. Who was Jyotirao Phule?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) A politician | (b) An economist |
| (c) A social reformer | (d) None of the above |

Ans. (c)

4. In which province was Maternity Benefit Act first passed under the stewardship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------|
| (a) Bengal | (b) Bombay |
| (c) United Province | (d) Madras |

Ans. (b)

5. Who wrote, 'Empowering the Indian Woman'?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (a) Anupama Rao | (b) Neera Desai |
| (c) Promila Kapur | (d) Urmila Pawar |

Ans. (c)

8.12 Further Reading

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Unit - 9 □ Dalit Movement

Structure

9.1 Objective

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Roots of the Movement

9.4 Ambedkar And The Dalit Movement

9.5 Post-Ambedkar Dalit Movement

9.6 Dalit Panthers' Contribution to the Dalit Movement

9.7 Dalit Movement Since the 1990s

9.8 Limitations of the Dalit Movement

9.9 Conclusion

9.10 Summing Up

9.11 Probable Questions

9.12 Further Reading

9.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the roots of the dalit movement
- the unfolding trends in the dalit movement
- the contributions of Ambedkar to the dalit movement
- the nature of the post-Ambedkar struggles
- the dalit movement in the wake of globalization
- the weaknesses of the dalit movement

9.2 Introduction

Dalits are amongst the most marginalized sections of the Indian population. They belong to those caste groups that are socially stigmatized as untouchables. Caste stratification of society in India, rooted in the Vedic tradition, has made for the inhuman degradation of a section of the population, stigmatizing them as polluting and hence untouchable. They remain victims of gross human rights violations, facing indignity and widespread denial of access to resources and services.

Caste and caste based society has not remained static over time. Over the years, major transformations in the structure and functioning pattern of castes have taken place. An initially perceived four-fold *varna* classification dating back to almost three thousand years, has over time seen the growth of thousands of caste groups referred to as the *jatis*. There are wide variations in the size of these *jatis*; some groups have a million members, while others have barely a thousand. To further complicate matters, the numbers of the *jatis* have hardly remained constant. Fissions and fusions have led to the birth of new castes. Time has seen the repeated occurrences of changes and mutations in caste being propelled, inter alia, by innumerable factors ranging from transformations in production mechanisms and relations of production to the impact of politics and unfolding struggles from below. However, despite the changes, the essential characteristics of caste, inequality and social exclusion, have largely remained intact.

The castes at the lowest end of the social scale, who were regarded as untouchable, were in the past referred to by different nomenclatures such as *Avarnas*, *chandals*, *achhuts*, *Adi-dravidas*, untouchables and so on. In British India they were, for administrative purposes referred to as the Depressed Classes. Gandhi termed them the *Harijans*. With the emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s these sections of the population came to be referred to as the dalits.

Most members of the untouchable castes, enlisted as Scheduled Castes, continue to live in extreme poverty, without land or opportunities for better employment or education. With the exception of a minority who have benefited from India's policy of quotas in education and government jobs, they are relegated to the most menial of tasks as removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers etc. Their children make up the majority of children sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper-caste creditors.

9.3 Roots of the Movement

The struggles of the oppressed castes for achieving social justice has a long history, going back into the distant past. In fact, it dates back to the time of the emergence of the oppressive caste-based social stratification system itself. Challenges came from many directions. Buddhism, Jainism, the Lokayatas, the Bhakti thinkers and numerous obscure sects questioned the premises of caste-based society.

By the 1920s the autonomous anti-caste tradition had clearly begun to take shape in India with the Adi movements, unfolding in different parts of the country, which were seen to be challenging Hinduism and could be regarded amongst the forerunners of the dalit movement. At an organizational level we find that in the 1930s three ‘pan India’ organizations had emerged to deal with caste issues. They revealed three completely different ideological directions and represented three altogether different lines in terms of all-India politics. These three organizations were [i] The Depressed Classes Federation. It was an Ambedkarite body which was connected with Ambedkar’s Independent Labour Party. [ii] The Depressed Classes League or the Harijan League. It was Gandhian and connected with the Congress party. [iii] The Depressed Classes Association. This organization was linked with right wing Hindus of the Hindu Mahasabha.

9.4 Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the first pan-Indian dalit leader of modern India. He has in fact been one of the greatest leader’s to have come up in modern India. Few would match his stature.

Ambedkar was an untouchable Mahar by birth, born in MHOW near Indore. He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambavade in the Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra. Overcoming the many hurdles that he had to encounter because of his birth in an untouchable family, Ambedkar was able to obtain first a college education in India and subsequently law and doctorates degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics.

Over the years, Ambedkar acquired exhaustive knowledge of jurisprudence, political philosophy, history, economics and western and Indian political thought; all

these added up to make him the outstanding statesman that he was. He had his analyses of India that was sharp and intricate, his vision of the future and a blueprint of action. At the centre of it all was his uncompromising commitment to social justice and his resolute condemnation of the Hindu Brahminical social structure.

Ambedkar arrived on India's political scene in 1919 through his presentation before the Southborough Committee. With his advent, the untouchables' demands for justice came to be articulated in terms of the modern language of politics. His struggles, thus initiated, revolved around the ultimate vision of 'annihilation of caste'. His able leadership was reflected in his presentations before the Simon Commission, at the Round Table Conferences as well as in the Constituent Assembly debates where he was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. At all these levels he put in his utmost efforts to see that the Depressed Classes were assured certain minimum safeguards which he felt to be essential for their security under the new constitutional system. He believed that minus certain safeguards their plight would be deplorable as on transfer of power, power would almost certainly go into the hands of the upper castes who would be ill-disposed towards the Depressed Classes. Amongst the safeguards, Ambedkar had demanded the introduction of a system of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes— a demand which he had strongly asserted at the round table conferences and a demand which had generated perhaps the bitterest conflicts between Ambedkar and Gandhi as was evident from the latter's launching of his much publicized fast unto death. In the analysis of Indian society and the condition of the untouchables, two important works of Ambedkar need mention in particular. One was , *Who Were the Shudras* published in 1946. The other was *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*, first published in 1948.

Ambedkar was a member of the Constituent Assembly. Initially, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal. In the Constituent Assembly he played a crucial role in the process of constitution-making and emphatically sought to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes in the process. In fact, he went so much as to assert that he had agreed to go to the Constituent Assembly keeping in mind their interests. The Constituent Assembly approved the Constitution on November 26, 1949. The Constitution thus drafted was however, not the perfect picture of what Ambedkar wanted to see. In fact, he had to accept many compromises in the course of its drafting. This becomes clearly evident from a reading of *States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure them in the Constitution of Free India*

which incorporated Ambedkar's vision of the Indian Constitution as he ideally wished to see it. It was published in 1947 and widely regarded as Ambedkar's alternative to the formal constitution. In several respects it was a major departure from the actual constitution that Ambedkar, as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, played a crucial role in drafting. It was undoubtedly a more socialistic, egalitarian and collectivistic state that Ambedkar was projecting in this document. It also included explicit economic and social provisions and special facilities for the deprived Scheduled Castes.

For Ambedkar, the State was a necessary institution. He visualized the state as performing three sets of functions and having three types of goals. One, the individualist functions and goals; second, the functions and goals in relation to justice; and third, the material economic functions. To him, the most important were those functions that were in relation to justice.

He elaborately sought to develop a strategy of emancipation of the oppressed sections of the population - the untouchables. Initially, he was somewhat drawn towards sanskritisation mechanisms as was evident from his early approach towards Gandhi and participation in the temple entry movements. Later however, he moved towards more radical solutions seeking to gain constitutional –legal safeguards for the untouchables, the demand for their minority status and ultimately to totally dissociate himself and his followers from Hinduism.

Ambedkar's efforts to counter the Brahminical system and ameliorate the conditions of the untouchable castes developed along varied lines. There were the lines of social struggles such as was evident at the Mahad Satyagraha. Political struggle was carried ahead through his presentations before the Southborough Franchise Committee[1919], Simon Commission [1928], the Round Table Conferences[1930-32] and the Constituent Assembly [1946-1950]. Organizationally, Ambedkar sought to carry ahead his struggles through the formation of first the Independent Labour Party, then the Scheduled Castes Federation and finally the Republican Party of India the formation of which he visualized shortly before his death but could not implement. The formal launching of the Republican Party took place after his death.

Last, but not least, there was Ambedkar's use of the religious tool. By the mid-1930s Ambedkar had been fully convinced of the necessity of breaking from the Hindu folds. After long years of contemplation on the matter, he finally decided to convert to Buddhism. His conversion to Buddhism took place in 1956, shortly before

his death. For him, it was not simply a matter of religious choice; it was essentially a social choice and was inextricably linked to his political struggle.

Ambedkar managed to bring the problem of untouchability into the spotlight. Through a sustained process of political mobilization on the one hand and hard political bargaining on the other, Ambedkar succeeded in establishing the untouchables as Scheduled Castes and as a politically relevant category both to themselves and to others, thus bringing them from invisibility to visibility, from silence to articulated protest.

Through his struggles, Ambedkar could ensure the conditions under which a large number of Scheduled Caste representatives could go to the legislatures in the days to come, and underline the necessity of improving the socio-economic and educational conditions of such peoples.

9.5 Post-Ambedkar Dalit Movement:

B. R. Ambedkar had announced the establishment of the “Republican Party of India” in September 1956, but before the formation of the party he passed away on 6 December 1956. His followers and activists planned to go ahead and form the party. As such, it was formally established in 1957. It enjoyed a brief period of organisational coherence and electoral success in the late 1950s and early 1960s. From the 1960s the Republican Party weakened, as it suffered several splits.

To Ambedkar’s followers, who range across a wide social and political spectrum, Ambedkar is still virtually an icon. The untouchable castes, today widely known as dalits, see in Ambedkar the vision of freedom and justice, a dream to be pursued. Even as they do not rally under any single banner, Ambedkar remains the father figure of the dalits, with each and every different political and social stream espousing the cause of the dalits, claiming to bear the legacy. From the purely political claims to the Ambedkarite legacy as manifest in the struggles of the Republican Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party, to the neo-Buddhist converts in search for an alternative identity of dignity, the entire spectrum of Ambedkarite following is indeed fascinating.

For several decades after independence, the dalits were used as ‘vote banks’ by mainstream political parties. It was only in 1984 with the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that Dalit aspirations to wield political power received the first fillip. The BSP emerged from the BAMCEF, a middle class trade union organization

that was founded by Kanshi Ram in 1976. The party [BSP] was the product of post-Independence developments: a long term process of democratization, policies of affirmative action, and rise in literacy among dalits particularly between 1981-91 which helped in the sharp rise of political consciousness besides, the decline of the Congress system provided space for narrower identity based parties. Equally important was the improvement in the agrarian economy in parts of UP leading to changes in rural social relations and the emergence of low caste identity. By the late 1980s the dalits were seen to be making significant impact in the political arena. The BSPs electoral successes in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India, for over two decades since the 1990's, contributed significantly in moulding the dalit mindset. The politics of symbolism promoted by the BSP under the leadership of Mayawati appreciably helped in the process of developing a distinct dalit consciousness.

Several decades of affirmative action programmes clearly led to the emergence of a significant Dalit middle class. Today, it is evident from data available from different sources that there has been a remarkable increase in the proportion of Scheduled Caste employees at various levels in the state sector. Even at the lowest levels of such employment, there is a regular salary, pension and opportunities of moving to urban living. All these in turn have opened the doors to them for sending their children for higher education and higher level jobs, thanks to the reservation system. Against this backdrop, dalit assertions and articulations have found new modes and channels of expression, impacting clearly on the political scenario. While earlier dalit movements and parties revolved around political leaders taking on issues of political empowerment such as identity, dignity and self respect, the new middle class dalit intellectuals focus on the need for economic empowerment through a variety of new methods.

9.6 Dalit Panthers' Contribution to the Dalit Movement

The birth of Dalit Panthers in the early 1970s marked a paradigm shift in dalit struggles in India. They spoke the language of defiance and militancy, which created waves throughout the country. The thrust of the Panthers was to universalize the dalit identity as proletarian experience. The Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra popularized the use of the term Dalit.

The Dalit Panthers saw caste as the major source by which their "humanity" was being virtually reduced to a state of "being no people." However, class analysis also

was used as an effective tool to understand the plight of this downtrodden people. This was clearly evident from the Dalit Panthers' Manifesto which stated:

...Who is a dalit? Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.

Who are our friends ? Revolutionary parties set to break down the caste system and class rule. Left parties that are left in a true sense. All other sections of society that are suffering due to economic and political oppression.

Who are our enemies? Power, wealth, price. Landlords, capitalists, moneylenders and their lackeys. Those parties who indulge in religious or casteist politics and the government which depends on them....

We do not want a place in Brahman Alley. We want the rule of the whole land. We are not looking at persons but a system. Change of heart, liberal education, etc. will not end our state of exploitation. When we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle of this giant mass will come the tidal wave of revolution.

There were several reasons behind the emergence of the Dalit Panthers. There was the economic crisis which was unfolding since the mid-1960s. Alongside it, was the growing disenchantment with corruption in the party envisioned by Ambedkar (i.e. the Republican Party); Further, working as catalytic factors were the growth of the city as a communications centre and the spread of education amongst the dalit population.

Even as with the birth of the Dalit Panthers there came about a major paradigm shift in the hitherto structured language of dalit politics, differences within the Panthers surfaced by the 1980s and splits began to take place. In course of time, most factions joined or allied with the Congress. Some Panther leaders such as Namdeo Dhasal even moved towards the RSS. What survived to exert greater impact than the Panthers' party was the Panthers' cultural movement—its impact spreading through the coming decades not just through Maharashtra, but across different parts of India. Under its impact flourished a whole genre of dalit literature.

9.7 Dalit Movement since the 1990s

Since the 1990s the struggles of the dalits have widened to enter the international milieu, seeking to draw support from the dalit diaspora, international organizations and rights bodies.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) was launched in India in December 1998. It was to act as a non-political secular forum comprising of a band of Dalit scholars and activists. The purpose was to promote solidarity, cooperation, and collective action at the national level for the promotion of Dalit human rights. Its efforts were largely directed towards demonstrating the link between Dalit issues and human rights issues. The NCDHR was involved in a variety of events such as the World Conference Against Racism at Durban in 2001, all World Social Forums, the 40-days Dalit Swadhikar Rally across India in 2004, the first ever public hearing on “The Situation of the Dalits in India” at the European Parliament in Brussels (December, 2006), and the first International Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women at The Hague (November, 2006).

It may be noted that the NCDHR was not set up as an attempt to subsume, replace or negate ongoing efforts of the dalits and others in various mass organizations, people’s organizations, labour unions, etc. Rather, its aim was to galvanize the movements into a representative body that would collectively organize, educate, agitate and demand an end to untouchability and casteism once and for all in both the government and civil society.

Further, from the late 1990s, Dalit Solidarity Networks were set up in different countries to promote the cause of dalit human rights. These *Networks* have formed in the US, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Sweden. They have brought under their folds individuals as well as concerned groups. Besides, they have linked up with international human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for the purpose. Seminars and workshops are organized, websites put up, signature campaigns and petitioning are undertaken.

In March 2000, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was formed. It is a network of national solidarity networks, groups from affected countries and international bodies concerned about caste discrimination. It aims at linking grass-root priorities with international mechanisms and institutions, to establish ‘dalit rights’ as ‘human rights’.

9.8 Limitations of the Dalit Movement

While over the years dalits have made significant advances in asserting their demands, certain limitations tend to weigh heavy on their steady advances. Of the major limitations, the following may be highlighted:

1. There is a lack of an all- India dalit identity. Despite the wide use of the term, the dalit identity remains somewhat hazy, suffering from internal differentiations. For different groups the term has had different connotations.
2. In different regions and states , too, the dalit identity has been differently perceived as it is a product of the specific social, economic and political context.
3. While even today, movements at the grassroot level constitute the most important form of dalit assertion, increasing divisions amongst dalit sub-castes operate as a major limitation.
4. Dalit political parties are by and large based on sub-caste identities and therefore do not get equal support from all sections of dalits.
5. Networking between dalit activists, both political and non-political, remains weak. While both the lines of struggles, the political and civil society based movements are committed to the cause of amelioration of the conditions of the dalits, they proceed along distinctly different courses, seldom linking up.
6. Major differences amongst dalit organizations revolve around questions of targets, leadership and coordination.
7. Even as dalits in their ongoing struggles critique the Brahminical system, they are yet to posit a comprehensive frame of an alternative culture in opposition to it.
8. Dalit political groups and parties, as they get caught in the tangle of vote bank politics and frequently shift allegiances, prove to be rather vulnerable to manipulations and criticisms.
9. Leadership is another major problem. After Ambedkar, no leader of similar stature, has so far emerged in the field of dalit politics who enjoys the allegiance of dalits across the country and across the different groups.

9.9 Conclusion

The post-90s, due to the unfolding processes of globalization, have on the one hand witnessed growing hardships for the Dalit population and on the other hand a sliding back of some of the gains won over the years.

Alongside, the period has also been witnessing the articulation of new demands. Dalit attention is no longer focused exclusively on reservation demands in the public sector. Realising the shrinking space in the public sector, private sector reservation demands are coming up as important 'issues'. Also important is the fact that attempts are being made to articulate Dalit demands in terms of the global human rights paradigm and not simply in terms of India's own constitutional-statutory framework. Moreover, the appeal for justice today is not just a plea to the state, it is an appeal which is taken to the highest international organisation - the United Nations, seeking its intervention in varied ways. The growing importance of funding bodies is recognised and efforts are on to bring them to bear on the Indian government to ensure the protection of Dalit interests. Organisationally, the attempts to mobilise are no more confined to the Dalit population within the country but go beyond, to enlist the support of the Dalit diaspora. This is evident in the organising of several international conferences of Dalits outside India from 1998 onwards.

9.10 Summing Up

The assertion efforts of the marginalized castes have a long history. Untouchables, as they have been considered, have been fighting for dignity and social justice. The early struggles were largely articulated in religious terms, to be followed by social economic and political struggles.

Ambedkar played a vital role in awakening dalit consciousness and identity in modern India. It was through his persistent efforts that the untouchables' issue came to the fore and demanded resolution of sorts. Ambedkar virtually became an icon for the untouchable castes. After his death, his legacy was carried forward by his followers, though in a fragmented fashion. Today, rather than speaking of a single dalit movement we need to speak of multiple movements; some directly political, some indirectly so, and others operating at the level of civil society.

Since the post-1990s, we have been witnessing the articulation of new demands in new style and the use of new tools, alongside the more traditional ones at the national and

international levels. Efforts are made to draw the attention of the international community and locate the dalit issue within the wider frame of human rights.

9.11 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Discuss the importance of Ambedkar's leadership of the dalit movement.
2. Examine the trends in the post-Ambedkar dalit struggles.
3. How would you assess the contributions of the Dalit Panther Movement ?
4. Attempt an assessment of the dalit movement in contemporary India.
5. Outline the trends of the dalit movement in the post-1990s.
6. What , in your opinion are the major shortcomings of the dalit movement in India today ?

B. Short Questions :

1. Who according to the Dalit Panthers is a dalit ?
2. How has the dalit diaspora contributed towards the dalit movement ?
3. Write a brief note on the Bahujan Samaj Party in India.

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. In which State did Dalit Panther Movement emerge?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| (a) Gujarat | (b) Maharashtra |
| (c) Tamil Nadu | (d) Karnataka |

Ans. (b)

2. Who founded 'Independent Labour Party'?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) J. L. Nehru | (b) Ballav Bhai Patel |
| (c) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar | (d) None |

Ans. (c)

3. In which year did Ambedkar arrive on India's political scene?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1919 | (b) 1920 |
| (c) 1921 | (d) 1922 |

Ans. (c)

4. Which is a Dalit party?

Answer Options:

- (a) Rashtriya Janata Dal (b) Janata Dal (Secular)
(c) Samajbadi Party (d) Bahujan Samaj Party

Ans. (d)

5. In which year was the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights launched in India?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1990 (b) 1998
(c) 2002 (d) 2005

Ans. (b)

9.12 Further Reading

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Unit- 10 □ Hinduism and Buddhism

Structure

10.1 Objective

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Ambedkar on Religion

10.4 Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism

10.5 Ambedkar's Choice of Buddhism

10.6 The Conversion Movement of Ambedkar

10.7 Significance of Ambedkar's Conversion Movement:

10.8 Conclusion

10.9 Summing Up

10.10 Probable Questions

10.11 Further Reading

10.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the features of Hindu society
- the basic tenets of Buddhism
- the course of development of Buddhism in India
- Ambedkar's views on religion
- the criticisms that Ambedkar leveled against Hinduism
- the reasons behind Ambedkar's opting for Buddhism
- the significance of the Conversion ceremony

10.2 Introduction

There are many religious communities in India. Prominent amongst them are the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians and Jews. While most of the major religions of the world are found here, there can also be found a wide variety of cults and sects away from the mainstream. These apart, are the people professing the several tribal religions which have distinct features of their own.

Hinduism has been the dominant religion in the region. It has derived from diverse literary sources including the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, Upanishads and Dharma Sutras. The RgVeda is considered to be the oldest of the Vedas and some of its hymns are believed to have been composed more than 1000 BC ago. What is known as Hinduism today, has developed through the processes of conflict and compromise of different population groups. While Hinduism in course of time, encompassed numerous faiths and customs, and was hardly a unified body of doctrines in the sense in which Islam or Christianity were, the dominant mainstream Hinduism over the years developed a rather rigid, hierarchically stratified social system, comprehensively attributed to what came to be referred to as the Brahminical system. On the fringes of it could be found the existence of heterodox doctrines, cults and sects, challenging or deviating from the dominant norms. Mainstream Hindu society believed in ascribed status, caste based hierarchic social structuring, ritual and not economic or political considerations being the criteria of status evaluation, the notion of *Rin* [debt/obligations to the gods, sages, ancestors and society], *varnashrama dharma*, the doctrine of Karma, transmigration of soul, and the idea of re-birth.

Buddhism emerged in India around the teachings of the Buddha. Exact periodisation is difficult, but according to the noted indologist A.L. Basham [“The Background to the Rise of Buddhism”, in A.K. Narain ed., Studies in History of Buddhism, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1980.], the Buddhist texts seem to reflect a period of at least a century later than the Brahmanas, and in all likelihood, much more than a century. The societies depicted in the Vedic and Buddhist literature are markedly different from one another. In the former, it is tribal, having only rudimentary government institutions. Customary practices and social control appear to be as good as law. In the society depicted in Buddhist literature, we find tribal loyalties being replaced by territorial loyalties. Populous towns and cities are springing up, material culture expanding and greater amenities are becoming available to those who can afford them.

At the centre of the Buddhist doctrine were the concepts of Nirvana and the Middle Path. The focus was on the path of withdrawal from the world with its possible satiation of man's deep longings for deliverance. The moral precepts for the followers came in simple style of presentation wherein there was no place for expensive rites, rituals and sacrifices. This was in sharp contrast to the Vedic complexities and the attendant self-aggrandizement of the priestly class which had by then assumed shocking proportions.

At the time of the Buddha the caste system had in all probability not fully taken shape. The Buddha in all likelihood did not openly or directly confront the caste system, or Brahminism as such. Nonetheless, his functioning and teachings were an incipient challenge to the Vedic system.

At one point of time, Buddhism had been wide spread in India. Emperor Asoka's acceptance of the Buddhist faith and other factors were associated with the rise of Buddhist influence during the Maurya period. Following the death of Asoka and the fall of his empire, Brahminical teachings and influences began to make very definite entry into Buddhism. Under the Guptas, Brahminical power made a resurgence. With the Brahminical revival, Buddhism lost its hold and became confined to only a few pockets. Further, it inclined towards greater adjustments with Hinduism.

In modern India, Ambedkar revived it with his conversion initiative. While the bulk of his follower-converts were Mahars, its impact did not remain confined to the Mahar community. Through his conversion movement, Ambedkar sought to place his contestation of Hinduism on a concrete footing. Buddhism was seen by Ambedkar as a liberation theology and its 'Dhamma' as social morality and not as 'Dharma' signifying religious ethics. Conversion was an attempt to build a conscious non-Hindu identity for the Depressed Classes and provide them with a rallying point. Through the conversion agenda, Ambedkar was seeking to awaken the Depressed sections of society to a new level of consciousness that would be capable of stirring them into action for a genuinely democratic social and political order.

10.3 Ambedkar on Religion

Ambedkar was a believer in religion. Religion, he believed, is a necessity of human existence. It is a part of one's "social inheritance." To him, it was a matter of right living and a framework for a moral life. He conceptualised it as a system of moral values, a system of injunctions and prohibitions designed to promote a harmonious human life. A harmonious human life itself meant a life in which there is

equality and brotherhood among its members and one which is rationalistic in rejecting superstitions, mysticism, irrationality, blind belief ; in short, he had a humanistic rationalistic notion of religion. It would probably not be wrong to suggest that he had in mind a scientific religion of the type Victorians were trying to seek desperately as a way out of the personally agonising conflict between their Christian beliefs and their scientific knowledge. In an important article entitled “The Buddha and the future of his religion” which Ambedkar contributed to the Maha-bodhi’s April-May 1950 issue, he reiterated the need for a religion, but also spelt out the requirements of that religion;

I maintain that society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, society is sure to go to pieces. In all societies law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left to sustain its social life by postulates and sanctions of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.

Ambedkar, in the course of the same article further maintained that:

- (1) religion must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose respect, and therefore become the subject of ridicule; and thereby not merely lose its force as a governing principle of life , but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse....In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science.
- (2) Religion as a code of social morality must recognise the fundamental tenets of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Unless a religion recognises these three fundamentals of social life , religion will be doomed.

Religions, Ambedkar insisted, should be judged by social standards and be based on social ethics. He identified four basic characteristic of religion. First, he felt, religion in the sense of morality must remain the governing principle of every society. Secondly, religion, if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science. Thirdly, its moral codes must acknowledge the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Fourthly, Religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty.

10.4 Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism

Initially, Ambedkar had critiqued Hinduism but hoped he would be able to reform the religion, rather than have to reject it. But gradually he realized the futility of such attempts. This, went alongside with his growing disillusionment with the Congress leadership and Gandhi in particular. Congress, he felt, was upholding the cause of the Hindus, not untouchables. Alongside his disenchantment with the Congress, Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism became clear.

According to Ambedkar, Hinduism failed the tests of religion. "What is called religion by the Hindus", he noted, "is nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions". A critique of the Hindu philosophy was attempted by him in several of his writings. He either concentrated solely on developing a critique of Hinduism, or took it up as part of a wider project. The *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *Revolution and Counter-revolution*, *Riddles of Hinduism* were just some of the many places in which he critiqued Hinduism. The core of the Hindu scheme of governance, he noted, is enshrined in a written constitution and anyone who cares to know it will find it laid bare in that sacred book called the *Manu Smriti*, a divine code which lays down the rules which govern the religious, ritualistic and social life of the Hindus in minute detail and which must be regarded as the Bible of the Hindus and containing the philosophy of Hinduism." This Hinduism he attempted to test against the yardstick of utility and justice and found that it failed both the tests. Justice, he pointed out, is simply another name for liberty, equality and fraternity. But, in Hinduism "you will find both social inequality and religious inequality". By denying social equality and economic security Hinduism, Ambedkar showed, denies liberty. Hinduism fails even the test of fraternity as fraternity can arise only where there is a sentiment of fellow-feeling and with the existence of nearly two to three thousand castes this sentiment cannot grow. As for utility, he noted that the very structure and ideology of caste destroyed social utility and by denying justice, Hinduism *ipso facto* denied utility. "How", he asked "can a philosophy which dissects society in fragments, which dissociates work from interest, which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the right of man to interests vital to life and which prevented society from mobilising resources for common action in the hour of danger, be said to satisfy the test of Social Utility". Thus viewed, Hinduism he asserted "is Superman's heaven and the common man's damnation."

10.5 Ambedkar's Choice of Buddhism

Ambedkar's own interest in Buddhism was generated early in his life when in 1908 he laid hands on a copy of Buddha's life. As he contemplated on the possibilities of conversion later in his life his interest in Buddhism was revived and it was ultimately to that religion that he recommended the conversion of the Depressed Classes.

The merits of Buddhism, as perceived by Ambedkar, were seen as follows: a) Buddhism demands living existence and a life divine attainable here and now, not after death; b) it is a realism not an idealism; c) it upholds liberty, equality, truth and justice; d) it is dynamic, scientific and all-embracing; e) its explanations of life, birth and death are clear and logical; f) man is the centre of its study, nothing outside him

Ambedkar made a distinction between '*dharma*' and '*dhamma*'. In his opinion, what the Buddha offered was not a *dharma*, it was a *dhamma*. *Dharma*, Ambedkar asserted, was religion and a religion is personal, one which a person must keep to oneself. *Dhamma*, in contrast, signifies a rationalistic and humanistic way of life; it is social; it is righteousness, which means right relations between man and man, in all spheres of life, and, society cannot do without *dhamma*. Religion is a religion of rules, whilst *dhamma* is a matter of principles. In the latter there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices, or even god. In the Buddha's *dhamma*, since there is no place for god, "morality takes the place of god."

10.6 The Conversion Movement of Ambedkar

In 1956 Ambedkar converted to Buddhism. That was shortly before his death. The initial ceremony of the *great conversion*, as it is frequently referred to, was held on 14th October, 1956 at Nagpur. Ambedkar first took the *Diksha* from the oldest Buddhist monk in India. On the next day, Ambedkar addressed his followers and administered the simple conversion rituals to a large crowd that was estimated to be between 3,00,000 to 6,00,000. The speech that Ambedkar delivered on the occasion was simple. He rationalised the life of the Buddha and explained his teachings, and in the twenty-two Buddhists oaths which formed part of the conversion ritual, he extolled his followers to follow the teachings of Buddhism in rejection of Hinduism.

In Buddhism, Ambedkar found an Indian, not a foreign, religion which could legitimize the claims of the Mahars. As such, the conversion was not an individual act. Hundreds and thousands of *mahars* joined in it. It was in a sense the climaxing of

the social revolt as Ambedkar saw it, where, for the oppressed, the conversion signified a social rebirth.

The conversion could be expected to usher in a stage where the *Untouchables* would cease to do things the Hindu way; that is, refuse to carry out the demeaning tasks which the Hindu social order required of them. The conversion oaths devised by Ambedkar for the Nagpur ceremony not only contained positive statements about Buddhism, but also included negative statements about Hinduism. In view of its significance, the oaths are being reproduced below:

1. I will not regard *Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh* as gods nor will I worship them.*
2. I will not regard *Rama and Krishna* as gods nor will I worship them.*
3. I will not accept Hindu deities like *Gauri, Ganapati* etc., nor will I worship them.*
4. I do not believe that God had taken birth or incarnation in any form.*
5. I do not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of *Vishnu*. I believe this propaganda as mischievous and false.*
6. I will never perform any *Sharaadha* nor will I offer any *Pinda*.*
7. I will never act against the tenets of Buddhism.
8. I will never get any *Samskaar* performed by Brahmins.*
9. I believe in the principle that all are equal.
10. I will try to establish equality.
11. I will follow the eight fold path of lord Buddha.
12. I will follow all the ten *Paramitas* of the *Dhamma*.
13. I will have compassion on all living beings and will try to look after them.
14. I will not lie.
15. I will not commit theft.
16. I will not indulge in lust or sexual transgression.
17. I will not take any liquor or drink that causes intoxication.
18. I will try to mould my life in accordance with the Buddhist preachings based on Enlightenment, Precept and Compassion.

19. I embrace today the *Bauddha Dhamma* discarding the Hindu Religion which is detrimental to the emancipation of human beings and which believes in inequality and regards human beings other than the Brahmins as low born.*
20. This is my firm belief that *Bauddha Dhamma* is the best religion.
21. I believe that today I am taking New -birth.
22. I solemnly take oath that from today onwards I will act according to the *Bauddha Dhamma*.

[* - indicates those vows which involve a direct rejection of Hinduism and the Hindu way of life]

Several factors seemed to have influenced Ambedkar into taking the conversion decision. First, he tried to prove that the untouchables were formerly Buddhists; Secondly, Buddhism was a religion of Indian origin and Buddha was nearer to the untouchables; thirdly, Buddhism could withstand the severest scientific test and had the power and capacity to direct the destiny of the modern world; and, fourthly, the untouchables, by joining the world Buddhist community could pave the way for world brotherhood.

For the untouchable castes, especially the Mahars of Maharashtra, Ambedkar was the sole ideologue of Buddhism. To them, Buddhism was what Ambedkar said it was; this was partly because they greatly revered Ambedkar and partly because at that time there were only a few Buddhist bhikkhus in India and that too none had Marathi as the mother tongue. So, to the untouchable masses, Buddhism was what Ambedkar said it was. The new converts to Buddhism came to be known as Navayana Buddhists or Neo-Buddhists, and this form of Buddhism as Navayana Buddhism or Neo-Buddhism. In many senses, this Buddhism was new. It called for the active participation of the untouchable castes and revealed a distinct flavor of militancy that was earlier missing in Buddhism. The 'genteelness' of earlier Buddhism, its compromises with Brahminism, emphasis on the recluse and overall reluctance to come to a head-on collision with caste society were replaced with a mood of open challenge. Needless to say, Ambedkar and his followers faced severe criticisms from the side of the traditional Buddhists.

10.7 Significance of Ambedkar's Conversion Movement

One of the many imprints of Ambedkar's conversion movement can be found in the impressive range of material on Buddhism produced in Maharashtra as a result of the Ambedkarite movement. The literature broadly includes 1) guides to ritual and

practices as also histories of the conversion; 2) literature on the history and legends of Buddhism; 3) songs about Ambedkar and the conversion; 4) creative literature by Buddhists of the educated elite.

A large number of Buddhists in Maharashtra, illiterate and educated alike, are held together by the common belief that the Buddhist conversion has liberated them and that it holds out the only hope for the enjoyment of full human rights and dignity. On the whole, most significantly, it has set in motion the emergence of the consciousness of the dalit identity. A consciousness which bloomed in the pages of the revolutionary dalit literature of Maharashtra through the seventies, going hand in hand with the emergence of the Dalit Panthers in the political front, reminding one of the earlier likewise search for self-esteem by the Afro-Americans.

As of now, however, in material socio-economic terms, the effects of the mass conversions though significant, have not been too dramatic. On the one hand, refusal to perform caste ordained social and economic functions had been mounting amongst these sections of the people ever since the thirties. On the other hand, those who converted to Buddhism were not overnight socially emancipated by virtue of the conversion. Much of the same pressures continued to operate upon them even after their conversion as before such conversion. Besides, the inherent problems in the search for a religious solution remained; *dalits* embracing Buddhism could get caught up in other forms of superstition.

10.8 Conclusion

Not that all, or even a majority of dalits chose to accept the Buddhist option. In fact, a sizeable portion of the Ambedkarites stayed outside the Buddhist fold. Nonetheless, the impact made on the dalit political movement by those who chose to become Buddhists is noteworthy. It undoubtedly contributed to the rise of a new awareness and a new elite. In the rise of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s, for example, the impact of Buddhism was clearly evident. Leaders like Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale, belonging to different factions of the movement, recognized the liberating significance of Buddhism. In mainstream dalit politics of the Bahujan Samaj Party, Kanshiram spoke of Buddhism and his proposed conversion. It is reported that his last rites were done along lines of Buddhist rituals. In 1996, in meetings aimed at reviving the Republican Party of India in U.P., many spoke about Buddhism as the philosophy that should guide the party and quoted Ambedkar's *Buddha and his Dhamma*.

10.9 Summing Up

Both Hinduism and Buddhism are ancient religions of India. In terms of numbers of followers, Hinduism is followed by an overwhelming majority of the population, while Buddhism is one of the minority religions in the country. Hinduism with its belief system rooted in notions of Karma, transmigration of soul, varnashramavada and stratified social order, was strongly criticized by Ambedkar for its hierarchic stratification of society. After an initial hope of reforming Hinduism, Ambedkar lost all hope in Hinduism and by the mid-1930s he decided to convert to some other, more democratic religious order and recommend the same for his followers. His choice ultimately was for Buddhism. In 1956, shortly before his death, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism; thereafter he led his followers through the conversion rituals. The decision was a momentous decision. It was guided not just by religious considerations, but also by social and political considerations. The conversion movement greatly expanded the ranks of the Buddhists in India as large numbers of dalits, mainly but not exclusively Mahars, opted for Buddhism at that time and thereafter. These new converts to Buddhism are the Navayana Buddhists or the Neo-Buddhists as they are called.

10.10 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Explain Ambedkar's stand on religion.
2. On what grounds did Ambedkar criticize Hinduism? Discuss.
3. What was Ambedkar's logic behind accepting Buddhism?
4. How did Ambedkar distinguish between Dharma and Dhamma ?
5. What were the oaths administered to the masses by Ambedkar ?
6. What was the significance of the conversion movement ?

B. Short Questions :

1. When and where did Ambedkar's conversion ceremony take place ?
2. What were the conversion oaths that Ambedkar administered to his followers?
3. What was new in Ambedkar's presentation of Buddhism ?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Who is the author of the book, 'The Buddha and his Dhamma'?

Answer Options:

- (a) Mahatma Gandhi (b) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
(c) Yotirao Phule (d) J. L. Nehru

Ans. (b)

2. Hinduism "is Superman's heaven and the common man's damnation"—Who said?

Answer Options:

- (a) Swami Vivekananda (b) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
(c) Mahatma Gandhi (d) None

Ans. (b)

3. Ambedkar's great conversion took place in

Answer Options:

- (a) Mumbai (b) Nagpur
(c) Ahmedabad (d) Nasik

Ans. (d)

4. Who described "Manu Smriti" as the bible of Hinduism?

Answer Options:

- (a) Mahatma Gandhi (b) Rabindranath Tagore
(c) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (d) Thiru Valluvar

Ans. (c)

5. How did Ambedkar see the conversion of the untouchables to Buddhism?

Answer Options:

- (a) As a social rebirth (b) As a social progression
(c) As a social Development (d) None

Ans. (a)

10.11 Further Reading

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Module - 3
State and Economy

Unit - 11 □ Ambedkar's Interpretation on Land and Labour

Structure

- 11.1 Objective**
- 11.2 Introduction**
- 11.3 Ambedkar on Land and the Agrarian Issue**
- 11.4 Critique of the Khoti System**
- 11.5 Ambedkar's Struggle against the Maharwatan**
- 11.6 Ambedkar on Labour and the Labour Movement**
- 11.7 Ambedkar on the Role of State**
- 11.8 Conclusion**
- 11.9 Summing Up**
- 11.10 Probable Questions**
- 11.11 Further Reading**

11.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the context of Ambedkar's economic ideas
- Ambedkar's ideas regarding the necessity of land reforms
- the sort of land reforms proposed by Ambedkar.
- the desired course of industrial development as proposed by Ambedkar
- weaknesses of the contemporary trade union movement
- Ambedkar's suggested course of labour movement
- The role that Ambedkar proposes for the state in relation to land and industry.

11.2 Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, born in an untouchable Mahar family in Mhow, has been one of the greatest leader's to have come up in modern India. Few would match his stature. His mastery over jurisprudence, his constitutional expertise, political finesse and outstanding knowledge of political philosophy, history, economics and western and Indian political thought all added up to make him the outstanding statesman and that he was. At the centre of it all was his uncompromising commitment to social justice and his condemnation of the Hindu Brahminical social structure. With the arrival of Dr B.R.Ambedkar on India's political scene in 1919, the untouchables' demands for justice came to be articulated in terms of the modern language of politics.

While to the popular mind, Ambedkar is known as the leader of the untouchables and constitution maker for India, his contributions to economics, though lesser discussed, was no less significant.

By virtue of his basic training, Ambedkar was an economist. He had obtained his M.A. and Ph.D degrees in economics from Columbia University in 1915 and 1917 respectively. Further, his D.Sc degree, which had been awarded to him by London School of Economics, was for his research in economics.

Economics seems to have been Ambedkar's major interest area while he was in the USA and London. After returning to India he did not write any book exclusively on economics as such, but economic analyses and arguments permeated many of his writings. There was evident in his writings, his anxiety for the rural poor on the one hand, and his concern for industrial labour on the other. His ideas, he believed would moreover set the country on the path of development.

While Ambedkar was in the USA, he had studied different aspects of American development. All along, however, he retained his interest in India. His analyses of Indian society was enriched by his American experience and training.

11.3 Ambedkar on Land and the Agrarian Issue

On the peasant question, Ambedkar was throughout pro-peasant and anti-landlord. After completing his studies abroad, Ambedkar had returned to India in 1923. In 1926 he was nominated as a member of the then Bombay Legislative

Assembly. In the course of the debates in the Assembly and even outside, Ambedkar expressed his views on various issues of importance including the agrarian question. Delivering his maiden speech in the Legislative Council in 1927 Ambedkar criticized the land tax as it was imposed even in those years when the peasants could make no profits. He enquired why a progressive income tax could not be imposed which would hit the jagirdars and imamdars the most. Even in subsequent times he adhered to this position.

Ambedkar's economic philosophy was constructed on a social frame. To Ambedkar the caste system was not merely a division of labour; it was also a division of labourers. He found the villages to be microcosms of the Hindu social organization. Therein he noted the existence of two distinct sets of population – the touchables and the untouchables. The former was the majority, the latter the minority. The former wielded power, the latter was a subject race of hereditary bondsmen whose lives were dictated by the dominant touchables.

Ambedkar's thinking behind land reform was to uplift the untouchables who were predominantly landless or small cultivators. Ambedkar's concern was that the untouchables should cease to be agricultural labourers. They should escape from their landlessness. They should either get industrial or white collar jobs or they should be given land for cultivation.

The remedy for the ills of agriculture, according to Ambedkar, was not primarily dependent on small holdings, but on capital and capital goods. He saw industrialisation as a natural and powerful remedy to it. Rural India's needs still haven't been met and this is only because of the discontinuation of simultaneous functioning of "Industrial development and Land Reform".

Ambedkar further argued that the outmoded methods of cultivation which were gradually decreasing in efficiency had to be replaced by joint or collective farming. In fact, he was all in favour of collective farming. He believed that the natural consequence of the abolition of landlordism must be collective farming or cooperative farming. In this respect, he had admiration for the Soviet system.

Ambedkar believed that to realize the collective efforts in the field of agriculture caste and casteism had to be combated. The great feudal estates based on casteism would have to be broken up and land distributed amongst the tillers and those collectively producing the goods. Extremely critical of the existing village system, Ambedkar held that the village republics were the ruination of India, a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism.

Ambedkar raised pertinent questions regarding land and the agrarian issues. These were :

- (A) Why do the agricultural holdings get fragmented despite the fact that fragmentation results in inefficient use of resources?
- (B) Are large holdings necessarily efficient and small ones inefficient? In other words, what is an economic holding?
- (C) What is the ultimate remedy for solving India's problem of small and scattered holdings?

Ambedkar did not agree with the view that the law of inheritance was the chief cause of subdivision of land. He attributed it mainly to an enormous pressure of population on land. For Ambedkar, 'economic holding' was to be determined from the stand –point of production. It is in this context that he argued that agriculture being an economic enterprise 'there could be no such thing as a large or small holding. To a farmer a holding is too small or too large in relation in the other factors of production at his disposal necessary for carrying on the cultivation of his holding as an economic enterprise. Mere size of land is empty of all economic connotations. Consequently it cannot possibly be the language of economic science to say that a large holding is economic while a small holding is uneconomic. As for the remedy, Ambedkar argued that industrialization of India was the soundest remedy for the agriculture problems of the country.

Ambedkar was a strong proponent of land reforms. He stressed upon the need for thoroughgoing land reforms, noting that smallness or largeness of an agricultural holding is not determined by its physical extent alone, but by the intensity of cultivation as reflected in the amounts of productive investment made on the land and the amounts of all other inputs used, including labour.

11.4 Critique of the Khoti System

Khoti was a system of land tenure prevalent in parts of the Konkan region in Maharashtra. The Khoti tenure differed from the ordinary Ryotwari in as much as in the latter the occupants of the land were directly responsible to the Government for the payment of revenue while in the former the Government employed the services of the Khot for the purpose of collection of revenue. The Khoti System thus to some extent resembled Zamindari System prevailing under the Permanent Settlement Act. The Khots were mainly Chitpavan Brahmins, while a few were high caste Marathas

and Muslims. On the other hand, the tenant farmers were Kunbis, Mahars, Bhandaris, and Shudra castes such as the Agris. Ambedkar launched a struggle against the Khots in order to emancipate the rural poor.

The Khots had rights to the land which was cultivated by the farmers. In return, the khots collected land revenue from them, a part of which was passed on to the government. It was an extremely oppressive system which virtually subjected the vast majority of the rural poor to near serfdom. The farmers and their families were treated by the Khots as bonded labourers, generation after generation.

Ambedkar's work "Small Holdings In India and their Remedies" first published in 1918 (*The Journal of Indian Economic Society Vol. 1,2,3*) was a seminal contribution to the theme of India's agrarian problem. In it, he strongly argued against the prevailing land tenure system (*Khoti*) in which the rural poor were suffering from extreme economic exploitation.

In 1929, presiding over an agricultural conference in Chiplun [district of Ratnagiri] Ambedkar, in his presidential address, strongly criticized the Khoti system. The Manifesto of the Independent Labour Party founded by Ambedkar in 1936, accorded a high priority to the abolition of the exploitative Khoti system.

On September 17, 1937 Ambedkar introduced in the Bombay Legislative Council a bill seeking the abolition of the Khoti System. By introducing the bill Ambedkar sought to put an end to the exploitation of the actual tillers of the land and establish a direct relationship between them and the Government. It was, however, only in 1949 that the Khoti system was finally abolished.

11.5 Ambedkar's struggle against the Mahar Watan

Ambedkar's struggle against the prevailing system of Mahar Watan was another significant dimension of his struggle against rural exploitation. He wanted to solve the problem of Mahar Watans by legislative and constitutional means. He was in fact *the first legislator in India to introduce a bill for the abolition of the serfdom of agricultural tenants.*

As per the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, Mahars were considered as village servants and required to work all day and night. In the absence of the employee his family members would have to do the work. And all this was for a small piece of land and a pittance of remuneration. Since the 1920s Ambedkar made several attempts to get this Act abolished. He introduced a bill in Poona session of Bombay Legislative

Council in 1937 (17th September) to abolish the Mahar Watan for which he had been agitating since 1927. However, it was only in 1959 that Mahar Watan was ultimately abolished under the Bombay Inferior Village Watan Abolition Act, 1959.

11.6 Ambedkar on Labour and the Labour Movement

Ambedkar stressed the need for industrialization. This he felt would move surplus labour from agriculture to other productive occupations. During the process of framing the Constitution, he suggested the inclusion of certain provisions on fundamental rights, specifically a clause to the effect that the state shall provide protection against economic exploitation. Amongst other provisions, this clause proposed that:

- * Key industries shall be owned and run by the state;
- * Basic but non-key industries shall be owned by the state and run by the state or by corporations established by it.

At the heart of Bombay's industrial centre was the textile mill area. Nearly ten percent of the workers there were untouchable Mahars. They came mostly from Satara, Ratnagiri and Ahmednagar areas. They worked mainly in the spinning departments and in menial jobs. They were denied entry into the more highly paid weaving department because of pollution prejudices. In the working class organizations including the Girni Kamghar Union, weavers were present in large numbers whereas Mahars were less involved. Ambedkar was aware of this and critical of the communists for not taking steps to tackle the problems of the untouchables.

It was against this backdrop that Ambedkar opposed the several strike calls that were given by Communist trade unions in relation to the textile mills in 1924, 1925, 1928 and 1929. It may be noted in this context that in the 1920s the labour movement in India was dominated by the Communist –led trade unions. Ambedkar appealed to the dalit workers not to join the strikes. His argument was that they were politically motivated and would bring economic distress to them. In 1929 Ambedkar, in fact, initiated extensive counter-campaign against the Girni Kamghar Union . He argued that he was not in favour of the strikes because the condition of the dalit workers had already deteriorated as a result of the earlier strikes and the creditors and money

lenders grip over them had tightened. Needless to say, Ambedkar was strongly criticized by the communists and, at that time, even branded as an enemy of labour. When in 1936 he launched the Independent Labour Party or the ILP the move was seen critically by the communists who considered it to be an unnecessary division of labour. Ambedkar however had his own arguments. He argued that communist leaders were fighting for the rights of workers, but not the human rights of dalit workers.

Not that Ambedkar was opposed to the workers' right to strike. He firmly believed in the workers' right to strike. But, he felt it was a weapon that should be judiciously used and always in the interest of the workers, not for political gains. Thus we see that in 1938 he led his Independent Labour Party to join hands with the communists in organizing a general strike against the Industrial Disputes Bill which sought to restrict the workers' right to strike by making all strikes illegal.

Ambedkar's involvement in the labour movement came in a big way with the establishment of the Independent Labour Party in 1936. While the prevailing trade unions fought for the rights of workers, they were indifferent to the rights of untouchable workers as human beings. The new political party took up their cause.

The manifesto of the ILP spoke of the need for an extensive programme of technical education for improving efficiency and productivity. It favoured the principle of state-management and state ownership wherever necessary. It argued for legislation to control employment, dismissal and promotion of industrial workers; advocated legislation for maximum hours of work, remunerative wages, leave with pay and inexpensive and sanitary dwellings.

In 1942 Ambedkar was appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council as Labour Member. It was a post that he held till the dissolution of the body in 1946. As the Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council he was instrumental in bringing about several labour reforms including establishment of employment exchanges, generally laying the foundations of industrial relations in Independent India. His contributions came both in terms of thought provoking speeches that he delivered and specific reforms that he initiated.

Through his speeches as labour member, Ambedkar brought into focus several important issues relating to the labour movement. In September 1943 while presiding

over the Tripartite Labour Conference, Ambedkar defined the demands of labour for food, clothing, shelter, education, cultural amenities and health resources.

Inaugurating a Conference of the Regional Labour Commissioners at Bombay in December 1945, Ambedkar identified three conditions necessary for preventing industrial disorder 1. A machinery of conciliation, 2. An amendment to the Trade Disputes Act, 3. A minimum wage legislation. He advocated industrial peace based on social justice. He argued that the workers on their part must recognize their duty to work, the employer must pay reasonable wages and the state and society must realize that the maintenance of proper industrial relations was a public affair and not merely a matter of a contract between the employer and the employee.

It is significant to note that Ambedkar framed many laws for Women labourers in India. These included:

- Mines Maternity Benefit Act,
- Women Labor welfare fund,
- Women and Child, Labor Protection Act,
- Maternity Benefit for women Labor,
- Restoration of Ban on Employment of Women on Underground Work in Coal Mines.

11.7 Ambedkar on the Role of State

Ambedkar spoke out in favour of industrialization and urbanization, but he also warned of the ills of capitalism, arguing that unfettered capitalism could turn into a force of oppression and exploitation. In order to protect the weaker sections of society from exploitation, Ambedkar visualized a key role for the state. In Clause 4, Article II of his Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly, he mentioned that—

- a. Agriculture should be a state industry.
- b. Key industries would be owned and run by the state....
- c. A life insurance policy would be compulsory for every adult citizen [commensurate with his income]. The insurance industry would also be a state monopoly.

- d. The state should acquire the subsisting rights in agricultural land held by private individuals as owners, tenants, or mortgagees...
- e. The agricultural land acquired would be divided into farms of standard size and would be let out to residents of villages as tenants without distinction of caste or creed. There would be no landlord or landless labourer; the farms would be cultivated collectively. Finance for the water would be supplied, draft animals, implements, manure, seeds etc would be provided by the state. The state would levy charges on the produce of the farm as [i] land revenue [ii] payments to debenture-holders and [iii] payment for the use of capital goods supplied. The remainder of the produce would be shared among the cultivators in the manner prescribed by the state.

Thus Ambedkar proposed state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation and a modified form of state socialism in the field of industry.

11.8 Conclusion

Ambedkar's role in the abolition of Khoti system and Mahar Watan qualified him as an eminent applied agricultural economist, while his struggle for industrial labour gave him the distinction of being a labour leader.

For him, empowerment of labourers in India could not be brought about without addressing the real problem of caste system. He argued that the caste system had reduced the mobility of labour and capital which in turn, impeded economic growth and development in India.

“Turn any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill the monster,” wrote B R Ambedkar in *The Annihilation of Caste*. For Ambedkar, the route to a modern and just labour structure in India was the destruction of the caste system, which he believed was rooted in the basic tenets of Hinduism.

Ambedkar had limited opportunity of giving shape to his economic ideas. He could apply them in a limited way only when he was a labour member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. It was then that he instituted a Tripartite Labour Conference to consider matters such as a Joint Labour Management Committee and an employment exchange. He also attempted to institute social security measures for industrial workers.

11.9 Summing Up

- Ambedkar's understanding of the land and labour issues were deeply connected to his analyses of society as a whole, marked by his critique of the caste system. He considered eradication of the caste system to be essential to India's way ahead. He argued for radical land reforms to liberate the untouchable from the existing sufferings of his life. Abolition of the Khoti system and Maharwatan were important items on his agenda. It was not only the size of agricultural land that determined its yield, rather there were other components to be taken note of. We find Ambedkar arguing, inter alia, in favour of cooperative farming.
- So far as industrial labour was concerned, Ambedkar was critical of their existing trade union struggles as they failed to consider the special problems of the untouchable labourers. As such, he himself set forth to organize labour in what he considered the right direction through the launching of the ILP in 1936.
- In both the fields of agriculture and industry Ambedkar expected the state to play an important role to ensure that the system did not become exploitative.

11.10 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Examine how Ambedkar sought to emancipate India's rural poor.
2. Discuss Ambedkar's role in the labour movement in India.
3. Attempt an assessment of Ambedkar's critique of contemporary trade union movement.
4. Attempt an assessment of Ambedkar as an economist.
5. What was the Khoti system?
6. What was Ambedkar's stand on Maharwatan?

B. Short Questions :

1. What was the position of Mahars as per the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, 1874?

2. What did Ambedkar mean by saying that the caste system is not merely a division of labour, but is also a division of labourers? Explain.
3. What was Ambedkar's role as Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. In which subject did Ambedkar receive his Ph.D?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| (a) Political Science | (b) Economics |
| (c) Sociology | (d) History |

Ans. (b)

2. In which year did Ambedkar return to India after finishing his studies abroad?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1920 | (b) 1921 |
| (c) 1922 | (d) 1923 |

Ans. (d)

3. Which of the following statement is not true?

Answer Options:

- (a) Ambedkar was not a supporter of land reforms
- (b) Ambedkar was a supporter of land reforms
- (c) Ambedkar was in favour of progressive income tax
- (d) Ambedkar attributed pressure of population on land as the chief cause of subdivision of land

Ans. (a)

4. In which year was 'Khoti System' abolished?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1937 | (b) 1950 |
| (c) 1947 | (d) 1949 |

Ans. (a)

5. In which year was 'Mahar Watan' abolished?

Answer Options:

(a) 1949

(b) 1950

(c) 1957

(d) 1959

Ans. (d)

11.11 Further Reading

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Unit - 12 □ Ambedkar on Planning and Development

Structure

- 12.1 Objective**
- 12.2 Introduction**
- 12.3 Phases of Ambedkar's Economic Ideas**
- 12.4 In Search for a True Democracy**
- 12.5 Social Structure as Hindrance to Development**
- 12.6 State Guidance for Development**
- 12.7 Agricultural roots of India's Economic Backwardness**
- 12.8 Directive Principles of State Policy**
- 12.9 The Reserve Bank of India**
- 12.10 Conclusion**
- 12.11 Summing Up**
- 12.12 Probable Questions**
- 12.13 Further Reading**

12.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- Ambedkar's vision of the ideal India
- why Ambedkar regarded caste as a detriment to development
- the importance of socio-economic planning in Ambedkar's opinion
- the lines along which planning, according to Ambedkar, should proceed.
- the importance of planning for development of India.
- the role accorded to the State by Ambedkar in planning for development

12.2 Introduction

Ambedkar is known most widely as the leader of the oppressed castes in India and the maker of the Indian Constitution. He is highly respected as the person who managed to pull himself up from his oppressed social background of untouchability and emerge as a leading statesman championing the cause of social justice in modern India. What is less known is the significant contribution that he made in the field of economic thinking in India, paving the way for India's planning for development in the post-independence period.

Ambedkar was born in 1891 into an socially marginalized , untouchable Mahar caste family in the Military Headquarters of War or Mhow as it is better known . Mhow was a place near Indore, then in the Central Provinces. He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His family was from the town of Ambavade in the Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra.

From childhood Ambedkar faced intense caste oppression. After such a childhood, however, through financial assistance received from the Maharaja of Baroda, Ambedkar was able to graduate from Elphinstone College in Bombay (1905-12), spend three years at Columbia University (1913-16), and one year at the London School of Economics (1916-17).

Through his wide academic exposures, Ambedkar was much influenced by western stalwarts such as John Dewey, Edwin Robert Anderson Seligman, Goldenweiser, Edwin Cannan, John Maynard Keynes, Bertrand Russel among others.

It may be noted that during Ambedkar's time, very few of India's leaders had been educated in the USA. During the British period as it was, England, and to a lesser extent, France and Germany were the focal points for overseas studies. However, Ambedkar decided to go to the USA.

As a student at Columbia University he widely explored the economic and social aspects of American development. He took up a large number of courses ranging from the economics of American railways to American history. Interestingly however, his own original research at Columbia University focused on Indian themes.

Ambedkar's concern for development of India was evident from the time of his early research. His major writings on economic issues appeared by the 1920s. While they bore the imprint of a generally neo-classic economic theory, they also revealed his overall identification with the toiling masses and a sharp critique of colonialism.

As early as in 1918, he published a paper in the *Journal of Indian Economic Society* titled 'Small Holdings in India and their Remedies'. Therein, he presented an economic analysis of agricultural backwardness in India and proposed industrial development as its solution. Ambedkar approached the issue of small holdings from the standpoint of economics of production. The farm, be it small or large, was a paying economic unit in terms of production, governed not by land alone but by a combination of land, capital and labour. Mere size of the land, as it is normally viewed, did not make a piece of land economical or uneconomical. It was the proportion of other factors of production on the land that were considered to be vital.

His early scholarly contributions were in the form of dissertations for various advanced degrees that he earned from different universities across the world. His incisive analyses of economic issues is evident in his three works :

1. Administration and Finance of the East India Company
2. The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India
3. The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and its Solution

Of the three works mentioned above, the first focused on the finances of the East India Company, the second sought to analyse the evolution of centre state financial relationship in British India while the third was an examination of the evolution of the India currency system.

Administration and Finance of the East India Company was a 42-page research paper submitted by Ambedkar at Columbia University as dissertation for the MA (Economics) degree in 1915. This dissertation offered a historical account of the administration and finances of the East India Company and brought out the economic and legal implications which ran counter to the interest of Indians.

Ambedkar wrote his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University on *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* under the supervision of Edwin Seligman. It was published by P.S.King and Company from London in 1925. In his writing, Ambedkar strongly criticized British colonial policy and pointed out its negative impact on India's development.

The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution grew out of Ambedkar's D.Sc dissertation. The work was completed in 1921 and first published in 1923. This work is considered as a magnum opus in economics.

12.3 Phases of Ambedkar's Economic Ideas

In the early years of his writings, we see Ambedkar as a general supporter of a capitalist organization of the economy, accepting it as inevitable and capable of providing the opportunities of growth and amenable to a balancing of interests.

By the late 1920s and 1930s we find Ambedkar's economic standpoint changing. It was the period of the Great Depression, the rise of new forces of change represented by the Russian Revolution and the upsurge of the working class in India itself. Ambedkar's interest in Marxism is evident during this time. Though with socialist inclinations, Ambedkar did not work out his economic theory and there were no exclusive economic writings penned by him after the twenties.

By the mid-1930s Ambedkar had moved further towards economic radicalism focusing on the current themes of his times, namely exploitation by capitalists and landlords and the need for state control.

On the whole, it may be said that in Ambedkar's politics the American influence was strong; in his economics, the Soviet influence was evident and his socialist stance was obvious. Yet, in the essential features of his approach to economic problems we find a rejection of both *laissez-faire* and rigid scientific socialism.

12.4 In search for a True Democracy

Ambedkar's was a fervent search for the ingredients of a true democracy. In his world view, social justice and empowerment of the oppressed masses were interlinked issues, one complementary of the other. To him, these were the pillars of democracy. He believed in democracy in its totality – a democracy that cannot be kept confined to the arena of politics alone. Without being implemented in the social and economic spheres, democracy would be meaningless in the field of politics. He was fully aware of the fact that the essence of a democratic system is equality and equal access to resources and opportunities.

Against Ambedkar's yardstick, India failed miserably in fulfilling the requirements of a true democracy. Indian society, he observed, is marked by inherent structural inequality that has evolved over thousands of years in this region. The system, has made for a hierarchy of privileges, power, status and authority. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy have suffered generations of social exclusion, economic marginalization

and overall denial of power. This exclusion of sections of the population from equal opportunities is a major blot on Indian society. It is a shocking violation of human rights and an outright negation of the basic principles of democracy.

12.5 Social Structure as Hindrance to Development

To Ambedkar, India with its highly stratified society, marked by deep social inequalities, hardly qualified to be called a nation. It was in sharp contradiction to his own vision of a modern nation. In his vision, the modern nation had to be built on principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

He said in the Constituent Assembly on 26th November 1949:

How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? In India there are castes. The castes are anti-national. In the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste. But we must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. For fraternity can be a fact only when there is a nation. Without fraternity equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.

At the time of adoption of the Constitution, Ambedkar was wary of what the future would hold out in view of the prevailing socio-economic inequalities. As such, he warned that : “ on the 26th January 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality.... How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy.”

Ambedkar's economic ideas thus developed within the overall framework of his social thought. He was fully aware of the economic implications of the social oppression prevalent in India. Repeatedly he highlighted how the Hindu Brahminical system in India was the cause of oppression in India.

The dysfunctional effects of caste stratification were pointed out by him in the following words-

‘... the stratification of occupations which is the result of the caste system is positively pernicious. Industry is never static. It undergoes rapid and abrupt changes. With such changes an individual must be free to change his occupation.... There are many occupations in India which on account of the fact that they are regarded as degraded by the Hindus provoke those who are engaged in them to aversion. There is a constant desire to evade and escape from such occupations which arises solely because of the blighting effect which they produce upon those who follow them owing to the slight and stigma cast upon them by the Hindu religion. What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men’s hearts nor their minds are in their work ? As an economic organisation caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as , it involves the subordination of man’s natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.’

As far as the practice of untouchability was concerned, Ambedkar did not regard it simply as a religious issue. In his view, untouchability was an economic issue that was in essence worse than a system of slavery. ‘In slavery’ he pointed out , ‘the master at any rate had the responsibility to feed, clothe and house the slave and keep him in good condition lest the market value of the slave should decrease. But in the system of untouchability the Hindu takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchable. Hence, as an economic system it permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation’ . The overall economics of caste and untouchability was explained by Ambedkar, particular in two of his works, namely, *Annihilation of Caste* and *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To the Untouchables*.

According to Ambedkar, economic growth and development in India was thus impeded by the caste system. He noted that the social system restricts mobility of

labour as well as capital, which in turn breeds inefficiency in the production process and thereby hampers economic growth. The process of economic growth demands continuous changes in socio-economic patterns. Contrarily, the caste system advocates perpetuation of the traditional socio-economic pattern and as such is detrimental to economic development.

In his undelivered lecture published in 1936 under the title *Annihilation of Caste*, that was to have been delivered as Presidential Address at the meeting of the Jat Pat Todak Mandal but which was not delivered as the organisers chose to cancel the invitation because the proposed lecture was too radical, Ambedkar did not mince words in asserting: “there is no doubt, in my opinion, that unless you change your social order you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilize the community either for defence or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation, you cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack, and will never be a whole.” But then, how could that foundation of caste be challenged? This could be achieved not simply by challenging the caste system; because the roots of the system were embedded in religion and people’s religious obligations tied them to the system. Hence the religion that made for the system itself needed to be challenged.

12.6 State Guidance for Development

States and Minorities, written by Ambedkar, was presented as a submission to the Constituent Assembly in 1947. It was initially published in 1945 as a standalone book. Ambedkar wrote *States and Minorities* on the request and on behalf of the Scheduled Caste Federation, an organisation that he himself had founded in the early 1940s. It incorporated his notion of what provisions the Constitution should incorporate.

In *States and Minorities* Ambedkar advocated an economic policy framework specifically aimed at providing protection against economic exploitation to the vulnerable sections of society. We find Ambedkar speaking of the obligation of the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth. It was in fact a call for ‘state socialism’ that was put forth, including nationalization of basic industries and land, collective farming with peasants being treated as tenants of the state.

Ambedkar argued for state socialism both from the side of the development needs of India as well as for the protection of the rights of the working classes. He argued that state socialism is essential for the rapid industrialisation of India. Private enterprise, he believed, would not do it, and if it did, it would produce those inequalities of wealth which capitalism had produced in Europe.

12.7 Agricultural roots of India's Economic Backwardness

Ambedkar regarded the problem of India's overall economic backwardness to be rooted in India's agricultural backwardness. In his early writings, Ambedkar had expressed support for small peasant holdings as the alternative to landlordism. Later however we find him shifting his arguments in favour of enhanced agricultural production through mechanization. For addressing the problem of agricultural backwardness, attention would have to be given to enhancing the productivity of land and labour. He realized that it was not simply a matter of the size of a plot; rather, productive capacity was dependant on a variety of factors that were important. In fact it meant that large farms could replace small ones and this could be done through cooperative or collective farms.

Ambedkar was in favour of state-guided development, oriented towards industrialization. He argued that surplus labour on land would have to be transferred from agriculture to industry. This would not only increase productivity but also enhance the value of labour in both agriculture and industry.

12.8 Directive Principles of State Policy

In *States and Minorities* Ambedkar had emphasized the need to retain parliamentary democracy and to prescribe State Socialism by the law of the Constitution.

Later, addressing the Constituent Assembly, he observed the dual purpose of the framing of the Constitution; these according to him were:

1. To lay down the form of political democracy, and
2. To lay down that our ideal is economic democracy and also to prescribe that every Government whichever it is in power, shall strive to bring about economic democracy.

To lay down the foundations of economic democracy thus envisioned, Ambedkar advocated the Directive Principles of State Policy to be incorporated in the Indian

Constitution. His argument was that there are diverse ways in which people believe that economic democracy can be achieved. These include the individualistic, socialist and communist ideas. However, he felt, as he expressed in the Constituent Assembly during debates, “it is no use giving a fixed rigid form to something which is not rigid, which is fundamentally changing and must, having regard to the circumstances and the times, keep on changing.” Hence, they should be included as Directive Principles. Ambedkar referred to the Directive Principles as ‘Instruments of Instructions’. He considered them to be policies and principles necessary to achieve economic democracy, which is an ever- changing concept and is dependent on the times and circumstances. As such, it would be wrong to lay down any fixed rule as to how it could to be attained.

The Directive Principles of State Policy came to be embedded in **Part IV** of the Indian Constitution covering Articles 36 to Article 51. They are merely guidelines for the establishment of a social order guided by social and economic justice, freedom, and liberty. The Articles include matters relating to right to work, right to education, the uniform civil code, and other principles of good governance that the State must take note of. Ambedkar defines them as ‘novel features’ of the Constitution. He expressly argued that the Principles are both fundamental and directive in the sense that they “should be made the basis of all executive and legislative action.”

12.9 The Reserve Bank of India

Ambedkar played a key role in the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India. India’s central banking authority is Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It was founded on 1 April 1935. Ambedkar was the one to think about the setting up of the RBI (Reserve Bank of India). It grew out of the need to find a solution to the economic crisis caused by the consequences of the World War I. Ambedkar laid down the outline and guidelines for the conceptualisation of the Reserve Bank of India in his book “The Problem of the Rupee- its origin and its solution”. Resting on it, the need, working style and its outlook was placed by Dr Ambedkar in front of Hilton Young Commission. The Reserve Bank of India was conceptualised on the basis of those ideas that were presented by Ambedkar to the Hilton Young Commission in 1925. This Commission came to India under the name of “Royal Commission on Indian Currency & Finance”. The recommendations of the Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance 1926, in turn, became the basis of the establishment of the RBI. The legislative assembly passed the RBI Act, 1934 .

12.10 Conclusion

In Ambedkar we find a broad economic radicalism interpreted as ‘socialism’ mixed with and growing out of his democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights. Ambedkar termed his own version of socialism as ‘state socialism’ and called for ‘nationalization of land’, or public control of the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy. His ‘state socialism’ was part of a very broad consensus that saw development in terms of industrialization and nationhood in terms of a centralized, strong unitary state. This was a view largely shared by both liberal capitalists as well as socialists though they disagreed on whether private or state control would be the most desirable. By the late 1940s and early 1950s all ‘development economists’ seem to have accepted some major role for the state.

12.11 Summing Up

- What Ambedkar presented was in essence a narrative of social change. He yearned for an India that would be free from caste, not only in the interest of the oppressed, but also in the interest of the development of the entire country.
- Ambedkar’s notion of development of India was thus inextricably linked to his notion of social justice.
- Ambedkar searched for ways and means of enhancing agricultural production. For this, he nurtured a vision of steering agriculture towards enhanced mechanized production and expansion of industrialization.
- He laid emphasis on collective or cooperative farming.
- Ambedkar expected the state to play a key role in planning for development, adopting certain very definite programmes in this respect along the lines laid down in the Constitution.

12.12 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. What, according to Ambedkar, hindered economic development of India ?
2. How, according to Ambedkar, could economic development of India be expedited?

3. What were the remedies suggested by Ambedkar for countering rural poverty?
4. In what ways did Ambedkar regard the social structure of India to be detrimental to development?
5. What were the responsibilities that Ambedkar felt should be taken up by the state in regard to development of the economy?
6. Attempt an assessment of Ambedkar's contribution as an economist.

B. Short Questions :

1. What were Ambedkar's major writings exclusively on economic issues ?
2. What was Ambedkar's role in the setting up of the Reserve Bank of India?
3. Explain Ambedkar's stand in relation to Directive Principles of State Policy.

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Which provisions of the constitution of India were described as 'instruments of instructions' by Dr. Ambedkar?

Answer Options:

- (a) Fundamental Rights
- (b) Preamble
- (c) Directive Principles of State Policy
- (d) None

Ans. (c)

2. In which year did Ambedkar present his ideas to the Hilton Young Commission?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1920 | (b) 1922 |
| (c) 1924 | (d) 1925 |

Ans. (a)

3. In which year was RBI Act passed by the Legislative Assembly?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1925 | (b) 1930 |
| (c) 1933 | (d) 1934 |

Ans. (d)

4. What according to Ambedkar, was the cause for economic backwardness?

Answer Options:

- (a) Agricultural backwardness (b) Industrial backwardness
(c) Technological backwardness (d) None

Ans. (a)

5. By which term did Ambedkar call his concept of socialism?

- (a) Fabian Socialism (b) Scientific Socialism
(c) State Socialism (d) None of these

Ans. (c)

12.13 Further Reading

1. Narandra Jadhav, *Ambedkar : An Economist Extraordinaire* , Konark Publishers Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 2015.
2. Debi Chatterjee, *Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 2019
3. Sukhadeo Thorat Aryama ed., *Ambedkar in Retrospect: Essays in Economics, Politics and Society*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2006.
4. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage, New Delhi, 1994.

Unit - 13 □ Place of Ambedkar in Indian Economic Thought

Structure

13.1 Objective

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Ambedkar's Writings on Economics

13.4 The Caste Dimension in Indian Economy

13.5 On Agriculture

13.6 On a Mixed Economy

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13.9 Water and Power Policy

13.10 On Labour Laws

13.11 Reserve Bank – Ambedkar's Legacy

13.12 Conclusion

13.13 Summing Up

13.14 Probable Questions

13.15 Further Reading

13.1 Objective

On going through this unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the basic elements of Ambedkar's economic ideas
- Ambedkar's analysis of the Indian economy
- Ambedkar's views on agriculture

- Ambedkar's stand on industrialization
- Ambedkar's stance on a mixed economy
- Ambedkar's ideas on planning
- Ambedkar's concern for labour
- Ambedkar's contribution to water and power policy
- the Reserve Bank's as Ambedkar legacy
- the extent of application of Ambedkar's economic ideas

13.2 Introduction

Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar has been one of the greatest leader's to have come up in modern India. Few would match his stature. His mastery over jurisprudence, his constitutional expertise, political finesse and outstanding knowledge of political philosophy, history, economics and western and Indian political thought all added up to make him an outstanding statesman and scholar. He had his analyses of India that was sharp and intricate, his vision of the future and a blueprint of action. At the centre of it all was his uncompromising commitment to social justice.

Ambedkar was by training an economist. Economics was his major interest area while he was studying in the USA and London. He obtained his M.A. and Ph.D degrees in economics from Columbia University in 1915 and 1917 respectively. Further, his D.Sc degree which he had been awarded by London School of Economics, was for his research in economics.

Ambedkar's contributions were mainly in three areas 1] monetary system and monetary policy, the role they are supposed to play in furthering welfare of people, 2] fiscal federalism, the manner in which revenue is to be collected from the social economy, as he calls it, for fiscal operations and the manner and principles on which should be based the relationship between provincial governments and the central government so that a kind of co-ordinate relationship is established, and 3] economic transformation of the Indian economy from its exclusively agrarian nature to a substantially industrial one in order to create productive employment for the toiling masses on the one hand, to raise productivity of agriculture on the other, and ultimately to end crushing poverty. In the later years of his life, Ambedkar's energies were devoted more to politics and social change rather than economic analysis, but

even his writings and speeches on politics reflected a deep engagement with economic issues and questions of political economy. Ambedkar's economic ideas reveal an uncompromising modernist bent of mind rooted in the tradition of the enlightenment. Ambedkar was concerned with promoting rapid socio-economic development of India along modern lines and towards such a goal his ideas were steered.

While Ambedkar's economic ideas were significant, his thoughts did not gain the deserved popularity in mainstream economics. This was perhaps partly because his identity as a dalit leader and statesman over-shadowed that of being an economist; it was perhaps also partly because of his own dalit identity per se. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that his thoughts on Indian society and politics have garnered more attention; but then, some of his economic ideas too definitely deserve greater attention. Today in the days of privatization, globalization and liberalization, it has become particularly important to understand the economic ideas of Ambedkar.

The significance of Ambedkar's economic thoughts can be judged by their fragmented adoption at various level of India's economic development, however limited they may have been.

13.3 Ambedkar's Writings on Economics

Ambedkar was a prolific writer. His exclusive writings on economic issues however were written during his days in the USA and London. After his return to India, he did not write exclusively on economics.

Ambedkar wrote three books and several papers on economics. The books were as follows :

- (i) Administration and Finance of the East India Company, (Columbia University, 1915).
- (ii) The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution. (P S King and Son Ltd, London 1923)
- (iii) The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India, – A Study in the Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance (P S King and Son Ltd, London 1925).

Of these books, the first and third represent his contribution to the field of public finance; the first one evaluating finances of the East India Company during the period,

1792 through 1858. The second book, represents a seminal contribution to the field of monetary economics. In this book Ambedkar examined the evolution of the Indian currency as a medium of exchange covering the period, 1800 to 1893 and discussed the problem of the choice of an appropriate currency system for India in the early 1920s. The third one analysed the evolution of the Centre- State financial relations in British India during the period, 1833 through 1921.

Ambedkar's analysis of Indian society was enriched in part by his American experience and training. American society with its theoretical emphasis on an open society, equality, respect for individual achievements, emphasis on the machinery for producing individual leisure impressed him. Ambedkar's economic ideas were focused on the uplift of the downtrodden in India. Through his economic ideas he sought the uplift of the depressed castes.

13.4 The Caste Dimension in Indian Economy

Ambedkar believed that the caste system was a major impediment to the economic growth and development of India. The system was seen to be responsible for the immobility of both capital and labour. Ambedkar pointed out that caste created division of labourers, not labour. He realized that untouchability was not merely a religious system, but also an economic system that was worse than slavery.

13.5 On Agriculture

Recognizing the importance of agriculture in the Indian economy, Ambedkar was acutely aware of the many problems faced by Indian agriculture. He identified the major problem of Indian agriculture as low productivity of land. One of the main reasons of low productivity was the small land holdings by the farmers. But, he pointed out that land is only one of the several factors of production; in order to increase farm productivity other factors like capital and labour should be given attention and rightly integrated with the land. In India, low agricultural productivity results from insufficient capital, surplus labour, and deficient irrigation, not just the size of land holdings. Ambedkar in his paper on "Small Holdings in India and their Remedies (1918)" suggested state owned cooperative farming and industrialisation as remedial measures. The article was published in the very first volume of the *Journal of the Indian Economic Society*, the learned body which came up along with the Indian Economic Association, but did not survive for long.

Ambedkar felt, ‘the natural consequence of the abolition of landlordism must be collective farming or co-operative farming.’ In this respect, he had an admiration for the Soviet Union’s policies. He said, “I prefer the soviet system. The collectivisation of agriculture is the only way to our ills . The Soviet system of agriculture is, according to me, the best”.

To give effect to the collective efforts in the field of agriculture, Ambedkar felt that it would be necessary to combat caste and casteism. The great feudal estates based on casteism need to be broken up and the land distributed to the tillers and those who can collectively produce goods for the rapid progress of both cities and villages. Ambedkar’s vision of the desirable nature of the state was concisely put forward by him in *States and Minorities : What Are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India*, a memorandum on the safeguards for the Scheduled Castes submitted to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. He said:

“The main purpose of the clause is to put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth. The plan set out in the clause proposes state ownership in agriculture with a collectivised method of cultivation and a modified form of state socialism in the field of industry .it places squarely on the shoulders of the state the obligation to supply capital necessary for agriculture as well as for as industry. Without the supply of capital by the state neither land nor industry can be made to yield better results. It also proposes to nationalise insurance with a double objective. Nationalised insurance gives the individual greater security than a private insurance firm does....it also gives the state the resources necessary for financing its economic planning ...”

13.6 On a Mixed Economy

Ambedkar wanted to combine economic growth with social justice. As such, he argued for a mixed economy. Ambedkar said that key industries should be owned,

controlled and run by the State. According to him, the insurance sector should be under State control; people might own private property but that should be limited to small industries and small landholdings; the industries would thus be owned both publicly and privately.

13.7 In Favour of Industrialisation

Ambedkar believed that industrialisation of India is the soundest remedy for the agricultural problems of the country. Ambedkar was visualizing India with modern industries. It may be noted that at the time when Ambedkar was writing, India was essentially an agrarian state with very few modern type big industries. He was much impressed by the industrial development of the developed countries of the west and considered such industries as desirable route for India's economic development. He considered industrialization as a helpful and effective solution for both agriculture and the Indian economy as a whole. In fact, he viewed the development of agriculture and economics as interlinked requirements. While agriculture was important, its development would have to rest on industry.

Although Ambedkar spoke out in favour of industrialization and urbanization, he also warned of the ills of capitalism, arguing that unfettered capitalism could turn into a force of oppression and exploitation. Thus he pronounced a word of caution.

For ensuring remedies against "economic exploitation", Ambedkar proposed, inter alia, that key industries should be owned and run by the state and that agriculture should be a state industry. Ambedkar argued that a modified form of state socialism in industry was necessary for rapid industrialization, and that collective farming was the only salvation for landless labourers belonging to the untouchable castes.

13.8 On Planning

Ambedkar believed that the strategy for India's Economic development should be based on eradication of poverty, elimination of inequities and ending exploitation of the masses. His ideas were useful in providing guidance to independent India particularly in terms of planning.

Ambedkar argued that the control of the country's economy is impossible if the population is not controlled. Hence he forcefully argued for population control and family planning in India. Later on, in keeping with his views the government of India adopted family planning as a national policy.

13.9 Water and Power Policy

Ambedkar is well known as the main architect of India's Constitution and leader of the oppressed. However, what is less known is his contribution in the development of India's water resources.

Ambedkar and his ideas were responsible for:

- the emergence of a definite all-India policy with regard to the development of water and electric power resources of India;
- the creation of the Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission, now known as the Central Water Commission and the Central Technical Power Board, now known as the Central Electricity Authority, as the administrative apparatus and technical bodies at the Centre to assist the States in the development of irrigation and electric power respectively;
- adoption of the concept of River Valley Authority or Corporation for the integrated development of the rivers in their region;
- introduction of the concept of multipurpose development of river valley basin for the first time in India;
- initiation of some important present-day river valley projects, particularly in Damodar, Sone and Mahanadi river basins; and
- amending 'entry 74' in the Constitution and bringing part of it to the 'Union list' and introducing article 262 regarding the adjudication of disputes relating to waters of inter-State rivers or river valleys.

Ambedkar contributed significantly to water resource development in India. He was instrumental in evolving a multipurpose approach for water resources development on the basis of river valley basin, and introduction of the concept of river valley authority which are summarily now- a -days termed as Integrated Water Resources Management. Multipurpose use of water resources for the regional development of the entire river valley basin was the key element of his water policy.

Ambedkar's role as a Minister of public works was noteworthy in this respect. Between 1942-46, when he was a minister, Ambedkar initiated the new water and power policy. The main purpose of the policy was to utilise the water resources of the country in an optimal way. Ambedkar had a vision about the projects keeping in mind the Tennessee Valley Scheme of the USA. He was a great visionary and perceived that it is only the multipurpose projects which could solve the problems of floods, famines, power shortage and irrigation.

For the development of the country, Ambedkar was in favour of building big dams. He initiated the idea of building the first multipurpose river valley project known as the Damodar Valley Project in Bengal and Bihar. As a part of national water policy the objectives of this project was to control the floods in the surrounded regions, to help the farmers through irrigation, to control the famines and to solve the problem of power supply. This is not the single river valley project which was architected by Ambedkar. The other projects were Bhakra-Nagal Dam, the Hirakud Dam and the Sone river valley project. Ambedkar was of the opinion that water resources and their management should be controlled by the centre, so that the problem of water disputes, water shortage, etc could be effectively tackled. To deal with the interstate river disputes he urged the states to cooperate with each other and proposed the “Inter-State Water Disputes Act” with “River Boards Act” in 1956. The first one was to settle the dispute between the states and the second one was aimed at regulating and developing the interstate valley projects.

As member of the Executive Council of the Viceroy, a position he held between 1942 to 1946, he established two organizations, namely the “Central Water Commission” and the “Central Electricity Authority”. These two organisations have largely contributed to irrigation and power supply in the country.

By introducing the power and water policy, Ambedkar gave the central government an important role in two key sectors.

He, moreover, proposed the interlinking of major rivers of south India. Ambedkar was the person behind the development of the National Power Grid, which is still functioning. He thus left the stamp of his scientific and rational outlook, his profound scholarship and essentially humane approach on India’s emerging water policy.

Ambedkar was successful in persuading the states to have an all-India policy, to develop the instrument of River Valley Authority to manage the projects on inter-State rives for multipurpose development and with active participation of the Central Government. He rarely allowed the planners to forget the significance of irrigation and electric power development for the poor. While pointing out the ultimate objective behind the irrigation and electric power policy, he observed that the planners should be guided by the right spirit and determination to arrive at the best solution and to open a path for the inauguration of a new water policy for a regime of prosperity for the poverty-stricken masses of the country. To achieve this, he said, there was an absolute necessity to ensure that the benefits of the irrigation projects filtered right down to the grassroots.

Before he laid down office as a Cabinet Minister in June 1946, he saw to it that the Resettlement Policy for the rehabilitation of displaced cultivators and non-cultivating households in the submerged areas of Damodar Valley was finalised. The resettlement policy was framed on April 22, 1946 by the Labour Department and was approved and agreed upon in the third Inter-Provincial Conference held the next day. It provided for compensation in kind, as far as possible-land for land in the command area of the Damodar project, with adequate housing and other amenities. This policy subsequently formed the base for the steps undertaken for resettlement by the Provincial Governments.

13.10 On Labour Laws

As member for labour in the Viceroy's Council from 1942 to 1946, Ambedkar was instrumental in bringing about several labour reforms. He also introduced several measures for workers like dearness allowance, leave benefit, employee insurance, medical leave, equal pay for equal work, minimum wages and periodic revision of scale of pay. He proposed the change of working hours from twelve to eight hours at the 7th session of the Indian Labour Conference that was held in New Delhi in November 1942.

Ambedkar also initiated specific reforms aimed at promoting labour welfare. On May 7th, 1943, presiding over the third meeting of the Standing Labour Committee, Ambedkar deliberated on the issue of establishment of an employment exchange. In the same year in September, while presiding over the Tripartite Labour Conference, Ambedkar defined the demands of labour for food, clothing, shelter, education, cultural amenities and health resources. Persuaded by him, the Conference passed a resolution to set up a machinery to examine the issues relating to wages and earnings and to collect necessary material for planning a policy for social security of labour. In April 1944, Ambedkar moved an amending bill proposing holidays with pay for industrial workers in perennial factories.

13.11 Reserve Bank – Ambedkar's Legacy

The Reserve Bank of India was founded on 1 April 1935 to respond to economic troubles after the First World War. Prior to the establishment of the Reserve Bank, the Indian financial system was totally inadequate on account of the inherent

weakness of the dual control of currency by the Central Government and of credit by the Imperial Bank of India. The Hilton-Young Commission, therefore, recommended that the dichotomy of functions and division of responsibility for control of currency and credit and the divergent policies in this respect must be ended by setting-up of a central bank, called the Reserve Bank of India, which would regulate the financial policy and develop banking facilities throughout the country. Hence, the Reserve Bank of India was established with this primary object in view. Another object of the Reserve Bank has been to remain free from political influence and be in successful operation for maintaining financial stability and credit.

The Reserve Bank of India was conceptualised according to the guidelines presented by Ambedkar to the Hilton Young Commission (also known as Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance) in his book, *The Problem of the Rupee – Its Origin and Its Solution*.

Ambedkar also knew that the problem of the rupee is eventually linked to the problem of domestic inflation. In the preface to the book version of his thesis, he pointed out: “...nothing will stabilize the rupee unless we stabilize its general purchasing power”.

13.12 Conclusion

Ambedkar had limited opportunities of giving shape to his economic ideas. His economic ideas could be put into effect in a limited way only when he was a labour member of the viceroy’s Executive Council. Whilst holding the labour portfolio, he instituted a Tripartite Labour Conference to consider such matters as a Joint Labour Management Committee and an Employment exchange. He also attempted to institute social security measures for industrial workers.

13.13 Summing Up

- Ambedkar was a student of economics, a theoretical analyst as also a professional economist addressing India’s economic problems.
- He believed that the state has an important role to play in the development of the country.

- In his vision for the development of the country, Ambedkar's deep concern for the weaker sections of society was evident at every point.
- While some of his ideas were implemented over time, much remains to be done.

13.14 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Discuss Ambedkar's contribution in the field of water and power policy in India.
2. Examine the basic tenets of Ambedkar's ideas with respect of developing the Indian economy.
3. What was Ambedkar's vision regarding industrial development in India? Analyse.
4. What, in Ambedkar's opinion, was the solution to India's agricultural problems ?
5. What were the contributions of Ambedkar towards promoting the welfare of labour? Discuss.
6. What was the objective behind the setting up of the Reserve Bank of India?

B. Short Questions :

1. In what sense does the Reserve Bank display Ambedkar's legacy ?
2. Write a note on Ambedkar's book, *The Problem of the Rupee – Its Origin and Its Solution*.
3. How, according to Ambedkar, does the caste system affect the Indian economy?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Which book written by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and is not on economics?

Answer Options:

- (a) Administration & Finance of the East India Company.

- (b) The Problem of the Rupee : It Origin and its solution
- (c) The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India : A study in the Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance.
- (d) The Annihilation of Caste

Ans. (d)

2. Why did Ambedkar believe that caste system was a major impediment to the economic growth of India?

Answer Options:

- (a) It was responsible for immobility of capital
- (b) It was responsible for immobility of labour
- (c) It created division of labourers, not labour
- (d) All

3. In which year Ambedkar wrote his paper, "Small Holdings and their Remedies"?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1915
- (b) 1917
- (c) 1918
- (d) 1919

Ans. (c)

4. Which project of Bengal was the brain child of Ambedkar?

Answer Options:

- (a) Farakka Project
- (b) Damodar Valley Project
- (c) Jaldhaka Project
- (d) None

Ans. (b)

5. In which session of the Indian Labour Conference did Ambedkar propose 8-hour working schedule for the Indian labourers?

Answer Options:

- (a) 4th Session
- (b) 5th Session
- (c) 6th Session
- (d) 7th Session

Ans. (d)

13.15 Further Reading

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Unit - 14 □ **Ambedkar's Views on Indian Federalism**

Structure

14.1 Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 The making of the Indian Constitution

14.4 The History of the Devolution of Powers in India

14.5 Nature of the Indian federation and the Logic of a Strong Centre

14.6 Emergency Provisions

14.7 River Water Sharing Policy and the Development of Water and Electric Power Resources

14.8 Conclusion

14.9 Summing Up

14.10 Probable Questions

14.11 Further Reading

14.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the history of India's constitution- making
- Ambedkar' role in the Constituent Assembly
- Ambedkar's vision of future India
- Ambedkar's scheme of strengthening Indian nationhood
- Ambedkar's understanding of federalism
- Ambedkar's consciousness of the weaknesses of a federal system
- Centre State relations in the vision of Ambedkar
- Ambedkar's arguments for having a strong centre.

14.2 Introduction

India is a territorially large, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural country demonstrating wide disparities amongst different groups and regions. Major discordant factors were evident at the time of the birth of the newly independent state. Under the circumstances, achieving unity in diversity was a key challenge faced by the constitution makers. There were the high risks of disintegration that had to be countered, just as there was the problem of integrating princely states into the new independent India. Creating conditions for fulfilling the rising expectations of the people against such a pressing problems called for building up of a suitable constitutional frame within which the administration would operate. The task was given to the Constituent Assembly. Borrowing features from various existing constitutions from across the world, the Constituent Assembly drew up the longest written constitution of the world for India. The Indian Constitution, thus drawn up, was not typeset or printed but was handwritten and calligraphed in both English and Hindi. The original copies of the Constitution are now kept in special helium-filled cases in the Library of the Parliament of India. Different features of the Constitution were borrowed from Britain, Ireland, Canada, France, USA, USSR, South Africa, Germany and Australia. By the provisions of the Constitution, India was structured as a Republic where a parliamentary democratic system was combined with a federal scheme having a strong centre.

14.3 The Making of the Indian Constitution

The Indian Constitution was drawn up by the Constituent Assembly through a long and arduous exercise undertaken by noted statesmen, intellectuals, freedom fighters of different regions, religions and political parties who were members of the body. B.R.Ambedkar was one of them, yet his position was distinctly more prominent than many others. He was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for drawing up the details of the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar himself had expressed his surprise at his election to the Drafting Committee. He said:

I came into the Constituent Assembly with no greater aspiration than to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes. I had not the remotest idea that I would be called upon to undertake more responsible functions. I was,

therefore, greatly surprised when the Assembly elected me to the Drafting Committee. I was more than surprised when the Drafting Committee elected me to be its Chairman. There were in the Drafting Committee men bigger, better and more competent than myself such as my friend Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar. I am grateful to the Constituent Assembly and the Drafting Committee for reposing in me so much trust and confidence and to have chosen me as their instrument and given me this opportunity of serving the country

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was the President of the Constituent Assembly, paid his generous tribute, to Dr. Ambedkar who, inspite of his indifferent health, had worked so hard, saying :

We could never make a decision which was or could be ever so right as when we put him on the Drafting Committee and made him its Chairman.

Ambedkar's role in the entire exercise was undoubtedly pre-eminent, even though he was not independent in taking his decisions. He had to accommodate the views of many others; the pressures were clearly evident. On important issues the ideas of Nehru, Patel and the Congress Party had to be accommodated. The Drafting Committee was responsible for drafting the primary texts of the proposed constitution; and had to give shape to the articles proposed by the committees, before placing them before the Constituent Assembly. Further, the Drafting Committee members guided the discussions when the drafts were taken up for discussion by the Constituent Assembly. In discharging his responsibility of piloting the Constitution through the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar received invaluable assistance, notably from three of his colleagues in the Drafting Committee, namely, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, K.M. Munshi and T.T. Krishnamachari.

It is pertinent to note that Ambedkar was one of the few members in the Constituent Assembly who was a member of more than one of the fifteen committees. Thus he could follow the debates on vital articles on different issues. Besides, as Chairman of the Drafting Committee he received all the propositions of the various committees and it was his task to reformulate the articles. It may be noted that Ambedkar was selected as Chairman of the Drafting Committee on the basis of his

administrative competence and political influence. His responsibilities were particularly immense as there was, for different reasons, a chronic absenteeism of members of the Drafting Committee from its meetings. Hence, Ambedkar was clearly one of the principal architects of the Indian Constitution.

The drafting of the Indian Constitution was very carefully undertaken. The constitution makers sought to draw on the experiences of other states and studied the constitutions of different countries, drawing what they considered relevant into the frame of the Indian document. On 4th November 1948, while placing the draft constitution before the Constituent Assembly for deliberation, Ambedkar observed in his concluding remarks ‘The Constitution can easily be implemented. It is flexible, at the same time whether in war or peace, it is capable and powerful enough to keep the nation bonded together. If the government does not run smoothly according to the Constitution the fault will lie with human failings and not the Constitution.’ [Vasant Moon, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2002, p. 188]

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has been one of the greatest leader’s to have come up in modern India. Few would match his stature. His mastery over jurisprudence, his political finesse and outstanding knowledge of political philosophy, history, economics and western and Indian political thought all added up to make him the outstanding statesman that he was. He had his analyses of India that was sharp and intricate, his vision of the future and a blueprint of action. At the centre of it all was his uncompromising commitment to social justice and his condemnation of the Hindu Brahminical social structure.

With all these qualities, Ambedkar was a member of the Constituent Assembly. In the Constituent Assembly he played a crucial role in the process of constitution-making and emphatically sought to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes in the process. In fact, he went so much as to assert that he had agreed to go to the Constituent Assembly keeping in mind their interests. A holistic democracy, having social economic and political facets, in a powerful united India was Ambedkar’s vision. And, he fought to realize that vision. In the drafting of the Constitution, his efforts in this direction were clearly evident. The Constituent Assembly approved the Constitution on November 26, 1949.

Ambedkar held the vision of a united India. In his very first speech in the Constituent Assembly delivered on December 17, 1946, much before he became Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. Ambedkar gave expression to his firm faith in a united India. He was participating in the debate on the historic Objectives

Resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru. He said:

I have got not the slightest doubt in my mind as to the future evolution and the ultimate shape of the social, political and economic structure of this great country. I know today we are divided politically, socially and economically. We are a group of warring camps and I may go even to the extent of confessing that I am probably one of the leaders of such a camp. But, Sir, with all this I am quite convinced that given time and circumstances, nothing in the world will prevent this country from becoming one: With all our castes and creeds, I have not the slightest hesitation that we shall in some form be a united people.

14.4 The History of the Devolution of Powers in India

During the British days, the idea of devolution of powers to the provinces had taken root. Under the Constitutional reforms of 1919 and the Government of India Act 1935 steps were taken towards provincial autonomy. While the 1919 Act provided for a dual form of government or 'diarchy', for separate subjects for the centre and the Provinces, under the provisions of the Act, the Provinces were at the mercy of the centre.

The Act of 1935 was quite a lengthy and detailed document. It consisted of 321 sections and 10 schedules. It partly came into operation in 1936 when the general elections in the country were held on the lines prescribed by it. A major feature of the new Act was that it marked the beginning of Provincial Autonomy.

The Government of India Act, 1935, granted a large measure of autonomy to the provinces of British India. It was meant to be an advancement on the path of establishing a responsible self-government in India, even though the Act did not give the Provinces the amount of autonomy that units generally enjoy in a federal set up. The autonomy of the Provinces were sharply restricted from different angles-the limited nature of subjects over which they enjoyed jurisdiction, residuary subjects were left to the discretion of the central Governor General and the provisions of special safeguards in the administration of even the provincial subjects. The Draft Indian Constitution drew heavily from the Government of India Act, 1935, particularly in matters of the details of administration.

14.5 Nature of the Indian Federation and the Logic of a Strong Centre

As India had so much of diversity, a unitary system of government would probably have been both unworkable and inadvisable. Therefore in order to achieve unity and integration, the federal system appeared to be the only course open to the framers of the constitution. The federal scheme that was adopted however was sharply at variance with the US model. While a dual polity was provided for, a strong centre was envisioned.

The indestructible character of our Union was assumed in the wording of Article 1. In his speech in the Constituent Assembly delivered while moving the Draft Constitution, Ambedkar had touched upon the differences between the proposed federation for India and other federations in the world. According to him, a federal polity is marked by the existence of a central polity and subsidiary polities side by side, and each being sovereign in the field assigned to it. In other words, federation means the establishment of a dual polity. The proposed Constitution was federal in character, insofar as it envisaged a dual polity. “The dual polity”, said Ambedkar, “will consist of the Union at the Centre and States at the periphery, each endowed with sovereign powers to be exercised in the field assigned to them respectively by the Constitution”.

Ambedkar was a strong advocate of federal structure of the union because India being a large country with diverse cultures, religions, languages, tribal and ethnic differences and even marginal racial variations, with historical geographical and political divergences, would not be able to function effectively as a democracy without possessing federal features.

But at the same time, Ambedkar was in favour of a strong centre. He believed it to be necessary for the unity of the country; in fact, he wanted a centre more powerful than that which was set up under the Government of India Act, 1935. Ambedkar believed that too much of federalism would hamper the uniform application of the Constitution across the territory of India. He was apprehensive, for example, that the article abolishing untouchability may not be evenly enforced if the states enjoyed too much of autonomy.

Though a federal system of sorts was proposed for India, the term federalism was not used in the Constitution. The Constitution spoke of ‘Union of States’. Ambedkar played a significant role in the matter of selection of this nomenclature. Before the

Constituent Assembly, the choice was between the use of the terms 'federation' and 'Union'. The Constitutional Advisor, B.N.Rau was in favour of using 'federation'. However, Ambedkar's opinion prevailed and the Drafting Committee chose the word 'Union'. Thus was established the framework of the Union of States. In the Constituent Assembly an amendment was moved by Mahboob Ali Baig Sahib Bahadur to use the word federation in place of the word Union. However, that amendment was not accepted by Ambedkar and it was negated by the Constituent Assembly. Article 1 of the Indian Constitution thus speaks of India as a 'Union of States.' Ambedkar justified the use of word "Union" on two grounds: First, Federalism in India has not been the result of an agreement among the units and Secondly, the constituent units of the Indian federalism have not got the right to secede from the union. In his own words, the constitution of the states is a single frame from which neither they can get out and within which they must work.

It was thus a unique federation that was planned for India. The US model of federation, which was considered as the typical model, had several weaknesses that Ambedkar highlighted while justifying the Indian variant of a federation. Two major problems of the former were its rigidity and legalism. In the Indian model, these were sought to be avoided by making the Indian federation a flexible federation.

The Indian state was to have a dual polity with a single citizenship. There would be only one citizenship for the whole of India, i.e. Indian citizenship. There was to be no state citizenship. Every Indian would enjoy the same rights as citizen no matter in which state he resides.

The dual polity that was proposed was clearly different from the dual polity of the USA in this as well as several other respects. In the USA the constitutions of the federal and the state governments are loosely connected; on the contrary, in the case of India, no state can frame its own constitution and as pointed out by Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly, 'the Constitution of the Union and of the States is a single frame from which neither can get out and within which they must work.'

As for the division of powers between the centre and the states, Ambedkar noted that while a federation being a dual polity based on divided authority with separate legislative, executive and judicial powers for each of the two polities, it is bound to produce diversities in laws, administration and judicial protection. But, when such diversity goes beyond a certain point it is capable of producing chaos. Hence, the draft Constitution sought to forge means by which India would have a federation and at the same time have uniformity in all basic matters essential for the maintenance of

the unity of the country. For this, three means were adopted : 1. A single judiciary was introduced, 2. Uniformity in fundamental laws, civil and criminal, was proposed and 3. A common All –India Civil Service to man important posts was provided for.

Ambedkar was an economist and with that expertise he played a major role in the development of the federal finance system of independent India, which he believed should be supportive of national development. His focus was on the economic welfare of the people and for it, he advocated an economic system from the local to the central levels that would progressively raise their economic standards without jeopardizing their interests. He gave importance to revenue powers and developmental responsibilities and its definite distribution between the State and local administration in a good and fair State system. He believed that there should be a clear demarcation of the distribution of powers between the centre and state governments and to maintain it, the responsibility should lie with the Finance Commission.

14.6 Emergency Provisions

Even as India was to be a federal country, it was to acquire unitary features during an Emergency. Due to this reason, Dr B.R Ambedkar referred to the Indian federal system as unique since during an Emergency, the system converts itself into virtually a unitary system.

There are three types of emergencies visualized under the Indian Constitution, namely, a national emergency, failure of constitutional machinery in states and a financial Emergency. Even though the Emergency provisions were included in the Indian Constitution they were not meant to be recklessly used. Such provisions had existed in the 1935 Government of India Act, which governed the colonial state and were retained in the draft Constitution. When members of the Constituent Assembly objected to this colonial legacy, Ambedkar stated, “the proper thing we ought to expect is that such Articles will never be called into operation and that they would remain a dead letter. Article 356 of the Constitution deals with imposition of President’s Rule over a State of India. When a state is under President’s Rule, the elected state government is dismissed and the administration is conducted directly by the Governor of the state. The Constitution is clear about the use of the power. It can only be invoked if a “situation has arisen where the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.” Dr. Ambedkar made it clear that “whether there is good government or not in the province (state) is not for the Centre to determine”, adding that he hoped that the

Article would remain a “dead letter”. “If at all, they are brought into operation, I hope the President, who is endowed with all these powers, will take proper precautions before actually suspending the administration of the provinces. I hope the first thing he will do would be to order to election allowing the people of the province to settle matters by themselves. It is only when these two remedies fail that he would resort to this article. It is only in those circumstances he would resort to this article. I do not think we could then say that these articles were imported in vain or that the president had acted wantonly.” (CAD: Vol. IX)

14.7 River Water Sharing Policy and the Development of Water and Electric Power Resources

India has many inter-state rivers and, not surprisingly, interstate disputes regarding the use of waters of these rivers. Ambedkar was fully aware of the delicate nature of issue of the sharing of water resources by the different states.

As such, he sought to work out a definite all-India policy for water sharing. He contributed significantly towards the development of water and electric power resources of India and the creating of the Central Waterways. The Irrigation and Navigation Commission, now known as the Central Water Commission and the Central Technical Power Board, now known the Central Electricity Authority, were visualized as the administrative apparatus and technical bodies at the Centre to assist the States in the development of irrigation and electric power respectively.

14.8 Conclusion

Some critics of the draft constitution regarded the centre as too strong, others as too weak. Ambedkar argued that a balance was being struck. Even as a strong centre was being projected, he pointed out that across the world the tendency was towards centralization of powers; in fact, he noted that even in the USA the federal government, despite having very limited powers given to it by the constitution, has virtually overshadowed the state governments. This, centralizing trend would even take place in India, but it would have to be resisted from becoming too powerful. Ambedkar wanted a strong centre, but in his vision a strong centre did not mean weak states. Over the last nearly seventy years it has been clearly evident that centre- state relations in India have operated on a delicate balance, as states have resisted the dominance of a powerful centre and the growing centralizing trends over the years.

14.9 Summing Up

- Ambedkar was the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He was a member of the Constituent Assembly and Chairman of the Drafting Committee.
- He played a significant role in the drafting of the constitutional document and steering it through the Constituent Assembly.
- Keeping in mind the need for national unity and being fully aware of the weaknesses that a federal system of government has, Ambedkar argued for and attained a federal scheme for India that made for a strong centre.
- In this, he consciously deviated from the US model of a federation. A single constitution for the centre and the states, a single citizenship i.e. Indian citizenship, division of powers between the centre and the states with a tilt towards the centre, a concurrent list, residuary powers in the hands of the centre, a unified judicial system, uniformity in fundamental laws and the All India Services were all aimed at making the centre powerful.

14.10 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. What was the scenario of autonomy enjoyed by territorial units prior to independence?
2. What were the means of making the central government strong as per the Constitution?
3. Do you think Ambedkar was justified in arguing for a strong centre?
4. What was the extent of autonomy enjoyed by the Provinces under the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935? Discuss.
5. Why was the term 'Union of States' rather than 'federation' preferred by Ambedkar?
6. On what counts did the Indian Union of States differ from the US federal scheme?

B. Short Questions :

1. What is the nature of distribution of legislative powers in India?
2. Why did Ambedkar want a strong centre in India?
3. Under what circumstances did Ambedkar think President's rule could be imposed on a state?
4. What was Ambedkar's views on federal finance?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. Who was not a member of the Constitution Drafting Committee?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar | (b) K. M. Munshi |
| (c) Jawaharlal Nehru | (d) T. T. Krishnamachari |

Ans. (c)

2. In which year and on which date did Ambedkar deliver his first speech in the Constituent Assembly?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) December 17, 1946 | (b) December 17, 1945 |
| (c) December 17, 1947 | (d) None of these |

Ans. (a)

3. Which Act of the British Parliament gave large amount of autonomy to the Provinces of British India?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) Government of India Act, 1909 | (b) Government of India Act, 1919 |
| (c) Government of India Act, 1935 | (d) None of these |

Ans. (c)

4. Who wanted the term 'federation' to be used in the AConstitution?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) B. N. Rau | (b) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar |
| (c) K. M. Munshi | (d) Dr. Rajendra Prasad |

Ans. (a)

5. Which of the following statement is true?

Answer Options:

- (a) Ambedkar wanted a strong center
- (b) Ambedkar wanted India to be a federal system
- (c) Ambedkar wanted the term 'union' to be used in the Constitution
- (d) All

Ans. (d)

14.11 Further Reading

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Unit - 15 □ Ambedkar's views on Social Justice

Structure

- 15.1 Objective**
- 15.2 Introduction**
- 15.3 Ambedkar's Commitment to Social Justice**
- 15.4 Ambedkar on Peasants, Labour and Untouchability**
- 15.5 Role of the State in Promoting Social Justice: Ambedkar's Arguments for State Socialism**
- 15.6 The Socialist Agenda of the ILP**
- 15.7 Marx or the Buddha**
- 15.8 Conclusion**
- 15.9 Summing Up**
- 15.10 Probable Questions**
- 15.11 Further Reading**

15.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to understand—

- the importance of social justice
- the problems relating to social justice in India
- Ambedkar's stand on social justice
- Ambedkar's struggles for social justice
- the problems of peasants and labour in Ambedkar's analyses
- Ambedkar's views on socialism
- the role assigned to the state in the struggle for social justice
- Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism for social justice

15.2 Introduction

The concept of social justice is a holistic concept that looks for equality comprehensively within the wider frame of society, perceiving it in and out of the court system. It is a political and philosophical theory which asserts that there are dimensions to the concept of justice that go beyond those that are already embodied in the principles of civil or criminal law, economic supply and demand, or traditional moral frameworks. Social justice tends to focus more on just relations between groups within society as opposed to the justice of individual conduct or justice for individuals. Social justice is often associated with struggles along lines of identity politics, socialism, and communism and is today seen as an integral part of the human rights discourse.

Dalits are amongst the most marginalised sections of India's population. Victims of Brahminical oppression, they are denied the very basis of human rights- human dignity. Socio-cultural and economic factors have for thousands of years entrenched the marginalisation of the 'untouchable castes' that form the core of the Dalit population. Caste stratification, rooted in Hindu religion, made for the inhuman degradation of a section of the population stigmatizing them as polluting and hence untouchable, leading to their persistent exclusion from goods and services. The products of their labour, of course, were not ostracized. In fact, their stigmatization formed the basis of the surplus extraction of their labour. Marked out as an identity group on the basis of their caste, they were doomed to perform certain demeaning tasks which were essentially labour-intensive, physically hazardous, and of low remunerative value.

15.3 Ambedkar's commitment to Social Justice

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in the military cantonment of Mhow in the then Central Provinces (now in Madhya Pradesh) in 1891. He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambavade in the Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra. They belonged to the Hindu, Mahar caste, who were treated as untouchables and subjected to intense socio-economic discrimination. Overcoming the many hurdles that he had to encounter because of his birth in an untouchable family, Ambedkar was able to obtain first a college education in India and subsequently law and doctorates degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics.

In the early years of the twentieth century, with the arrival of Ambedkar on India's political scene in 1919, the untouchables demands for social justice came to be articulated in terms of the modern language of politics. Ambedkar's academic acumen, extensive knowledge of both Indian and western philosophical thought, his expertise in economics and law placed him in an undoubtedly strong position in bargaining for the rights of the untouchables, the called the depressed classes. His personal experiences as a member of an untouchable caste – the pain and the trauma stimulated his determination to take up their cause for social justice. This he did with firm determination and unmatched skill. For the first time in modern Indian history, the untouchables began learning the use of political tools for protecting their rights. Dr Ambedkar's able leadership was reflected in his presentations before the Simon Commission, at the Round Table Conferences as well as in the Constituent Assembly debates where he was the Chairman of the drafting Committee. At all these levels he put in his utmost efforts to see that the Depressed Classes were assured certain minimum safeguards which he felt to be essential for their security under the new constitutional system. He believed that minus certain safeguards their plight would be deplorable as on transfer of power, power would almost certainly go into the hands of the upper castes who would be ill disposed towards the depressed classes. Amongst the safeguards, Ambedkar had demanded the introduction of a system of separate electorates for the depressed classes – a demand which he had strongly asserted at the round table conferences and a demand which had generated perhaps the bitterest conflicts between Ambedkar and Gandhi evident from the latter's launching of his much publicized fast unto death. In the analysis of Indian society and the condition of the untouchables, two important works of Ambedkar need mention in particular. One was , *Who Were the Shudras* published in 1946. The other was *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables ?* , first published in 1948.

Ambedkar was a member of the Constituent Assembly. Initially, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal. In the Constituent Assembly he played a crucial role in the process of constitution-making and emphatically sought to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes in the process. In fact, he went so much as to assert that he had agreed to go to the Constituent Assembly keeping in mind their interests. The Constituent Assembly approved the Constitution on November 26, 1949. The Constitution thus drafted was however, not the perfect picture of what Ambedkar wanted to see. In fact, he had to accept many compromises in the course of its drafting. This becomes clearly evident from a reading of *States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure them in the Constitution of Free India*¹

which incorporated Ambedkar's vision of the Indian Constitution as he ideally wished to see it. It was published in 1947 and widely regarded as Ambedkar's alternative to the formal constitution. In several respects it was a major departure from the actual constitution that Ambedkar, as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, played a crucial role in drafting. It was undoubtedly a more socialistic, egalitarian and collectivistic state that Ambedkar was projecting in this document. It also included explicit economic and social provisions and special facilities for the deprived Scheduled Castes.

15.4 Ambedkar on Peasants, Labour and Untouchability

Ambedkar entered India's political scene within a couple of years after the Russian Revolution took place. At that time, across the world, the impact of the Russian Revolution was momentous. Not surprisingly, Ambedkar too was inspired.

Even though Ambedkar was not willing to accept the domination of the socialists in the area of the struggles of the oppressed castes, the influence of Marx's ideas on his thought process was clearly evident. Between the couple of decades of the 1920s and 1930s, Ambedkar accepted most of Marx's economic analyses. He even attempted to organise radical movements of Mahars and Kunbi peasants against the landlords. In the pages of his journal, the *Janata*, published during that period, much was written about the workers and peasants movements against capitalists and landowners, alongside the narrations of the struggles of the oppressed castes. While Ambedkar's theoretical writings over the period were not too many in terms of numbers, in his speeches and programmes the Marxian line of analyses clearly found expression. In a word, it may be said, that during that period his position was clearly socialistic.

Ambedkar traced the problem of India's overall economic backwardness to India's agricultural backwardness. Dr. Ambedkar's thinking behind land reform was to uplift the untouchables who were predominantly landless or small cultivators. His primary concern was that the untouchables should cease to be agricultural labourers. They should escape from their landlessness. They should either get industrial or white collar jobs, or they should be given land for cultivation. His struggles against the Khoti system and Maharwatan were significant facets of his struggles against rural exploitation.

On the peasant question, Ambedkar remained consistently pro-peasant. As a necessary concomitant to the abolition of the zamindari system, Ambedkar emphasised

the importance of cooperative and collective farming. To put it in his own words, 'the natural consequence of the abolition of landlordism must be collective farming or co-operative farming.' In this respect, Ambedkar had an admiration for the Soviet Union's policies. Ambedkar believed that the collectivisation of agriculture is the only way to tackle India's problems and that the Soviet system of agriculture is the best. But, in the Indian context, to build up such an arrangement, it would be necessary to counter the caste system. It would be necessary to break up the large landed estates that have flourished in consonance with the caste system and distribute the land amongst the peasants; this would be required in the interest of both urban and rural areas.

Ambedkar stressed upon the need for industrialisation so that surplus labour could be moved away from the field of agriculture to other productive occupations. At the same time, however, he was aware of the exploitation that workers were exposed to.

Ambedkar noted that the Indian workers were victims of both Brahminism and Capitalism and the two systems were dominated by the same social group. Both needed to be countered. Even though he did not join hands with the communist trade unions in strikes in Bombay textile mills through the twenties because they did not take up the cause of the Depressed Classes to work in all departments, he was not opposed to strikes in principle. In fact, in principle he always supported the right of the workers to strike in support of their demands. It is pertinent to note that, in 1938, Ambedkar led his two year old Independent Labour Party into joint action with the communists in organising a general strike against the Industrial Disputes Bill which aimed at restricting the workers right to strike by making the strike illegal. Incidentally, it may be noted that although no joint platform was built up between Ambedkar and the communists at the national level at any point of time, at local levels, particularly in Kerala, many communist activists participated in anti-untouchability movements.

He initiated several specific reforms aimed at promoting labour welfare when he was Labour member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. He introduced several measures for workers like dearness allowance, leave benefit, employee insurance, medical leave, equal pay for equal work, minimum wages and periodic revision of scale of pay. He also strengthened trade unions and established employment exchanges across India.

For Ambedkar, the route to a modern and just labour structure in India was simple – it was, the destruction of the caste system. The predestined division of labour based on the caste system prevents the mobility of labour and capital, thereby harming economic development. Since a person is believed to be destined to do a certain kind of work, he or she is immediately discouraged to engage in any other kind of labour, even if the individual possesses the requisite skills. Similarly, an individual is motivated to invest capital only in the kind of work that is allocated to him or her by virtue of his caste. The inefficiency in resource utilisation that such a structure gives rise to, according to Ambedkar, was the direct cause of unemployment in India. Thus it is the caste system that would have to be erased in order to bring about workers' liberation.

15.5 Role of the State in promoting Social Justice: Ambedkar's arguments for State Socialism

For Ambedkar, the State was a necessary institution. He visualized the state as performing three sets of functions and having three types of goals. One, the individualist functions and goals; second, the functions and goal in relation to justice; and third, the material economic functions. To him, the most important were those functions that were in relation to justice. For ensuring social justice, Ambedkar considered the role of the state in regulating the economy of the country to be of utmost importance. Ambedkar stated in the Constituent Assembly that political rights would come to a naught unless accompanied by economic rights. And, these economic rights, he believed, could only be secured through 'State Socialism'.

In the Memorandum titled *States and Minorities : What are their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India*, submitted by Ambedkar to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, Ambedkar elaborately discussed about the desirable role of the state in the economic sphere. The idea was, "... to put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth." Keeping this in mind, the proposal given was of "... state ownership in agriculture with a collectivised method of cultivation and a modified form of state socialism in the field of industry. Without the supply of capital by the

state neither land nor industry can be made to yield better results. It also proposes to nationalise insurance with a double objective. Nationalised insurance gives the individual greater security than a private insurance firm does....it also gives the state the resources necessary for financing its economic planning”

While Ambedkar sought what he called ‘the establishment of state socialism in important fields of economic life’, he did not wish to abrogate parliamentary democracy nor did he wish to leave the issue of establishment of such a system to the hands of the legislature. He wanted it to be constitutionally ensured . He feared that otherwise the anti-state socialism majority when it comes to power may use its law making powers to undo the work of the pro-state socialism majority done earlier . To him, the problem was to have state socialism without dictatorship, to have state socialism with parliamentary democracy. And, to him, the way out appeared to be to ‘retain parliamentary democracy and to prescribe state socialism by the law of the constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of a parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate .’

Ambedkar felt that ‘State Socialism’ could not be secured if it was left to being a subject matter of the ordinary laws of the country. With changes in parliamentary majorities, the socialistic policies introduced by one party would be negated by another. Yet, an essential condition for the success of a planned economy is that it must not be liable to suspension or abandonment; it must be permanent. As such, he argued that state socialism and its elements should be made a part of the constitution itself. Ambedkar suggested that for ensuring protection against economic exploitation the following provisions, inter alia, should be included in the Constitution :

1. That industries which are key industries or which may be declared to be key industries shall be owned and run by the state;
2. That industries which are not key industries but which are basic industries shall be owned by the state and shall be run by the state or by corporations established by the state;
3. That insurance shall be a monopoly of the state and that the state shall compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as may be prescribed by the legislature;
4. That agriculture shall be state industry;

5. The state shall acquire the subsisting rights in such industries, insurance and agricultural land held by private individuals, whether as owners, tenants or mortgagees....

While Ambedkar stood for state guided industrial development, he did not confront the problem of high caste domination over the state machinery.

15.6 The Socialist Agenda of the Independent Labour Party (ILP)

In 1936 Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party (ILP). It was declared to be a party of peasants and workers. The party had a red flag. It may be noted that the 1930s was a decade when on the one hand the nationalist movement was gaining momentum and on the other hand socialist ideas were rapidly gaining ground. It was in such a milieu that the ILP was established. The Party managed to come up as the largest opposition party in the Bombay Legislative Council. It was the only party that simultaneously gave leadership to the workers and peasants against the landlords and capitalists as also struggles of the oppressed castes against their oppression. As such, through the ILP programme, caste and class struggles were sought to be combined. The day the ILP was formed, *The Times of India* published an article based on an interview with Ambedkar. As for the name of the Party he was reported to have said, “the word ‘Labour’ was used instead of ‘Depressed Classes’ because labour includes Depressed Classes as well.” The Party in its programme proposed a series of reforms to defend the interests of the industrial workers and demanded greater vocational and technical educational opportunities.

The Party, during the 1930s, spearheaded a number of significant struggles. Amongst them was the struggle of the Kunbis and Mahars of the Konkan region against the caste Hindu landlords. At the peak of the struggle, in 1938, some twenty five thousand peasants marched towards Bombay, in support of their demands ! It may be noted that communists, too, participated in this struggle.

15.7 Marx or the Buddha

Despite his socialist inclinations, as already noted, Ambedkar was not a Marxist in the conventional sense. Particularly in the later years of his life, he was vociferous

in his criticism of Marxism, the Soviet Union's political policies and the Indian communist movement. His criticisms were clearly voiced in his writings and speeches, during the period. In "Buddha and Karl Marx", a speech which he delivered at the World Buddhist Conference at Kathmandu in 1956 in criticism of the Marxian position, Ambedkar said: "Nobody now accepts the economic interpretation of history as the only interpretation of History. Nobody accepts that the proletariat has been progressively pauperised". It is interesting to note that, the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee appointed by the Maharashtra Government found three different typed copies of an essay on Buddha and Karl Marx in loose sheets, two of which had corrections in the author's own handwriting. On scrutinising them, the compiled version of the essay was published under the head "Buddha or Karl Marx". In it, Ambedkar explained his preference for the Buddhist ideology for emancipation of the oppressed castes as against Marxism, but at the same time expressed his appreciation for both and identified the points of convergence between the two as he saw it, noting that 'if for misery one reads exploitation, Buddha is not away from Marx'. It was in fact a detailed critique of Marxism. In the opening paragraph he explained his interest in both the ideologies and felt that "having read both and being interested in the ideology of both, a comparison between them just forces itself upon me". He noted that only part of the original creed of Marxism has survived the test of time. He observed, "The Marxian creed was propounded sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since then it has been subjected to much criticism. As a result of this criticism much of the ideological structure raised by Karl Marx has broken to pieces. ...what remains of the Karl Marx is a residue of fire, small but still very important". This residue was identified by Ambedkar as comprising of four items as follows: 1. The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world. 2. That there is a conflict of interest between class and class. 3. That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation. 4. That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property. The main differences between Buddha and Marx were seen in terms of means rather than ends. The end, Ambedkar felt, was common to both.

Born as he was in an untouchable Hindu family, exposed to the marginalization and exclusion that it entailed, Ambedkar was early convinced of the necessity of breaking from the Hindu folds. At the time of the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, itself, Ambedkar had expressed his desire to step out of the Hindu frame. By the mid-1930s he was firmly convinced in this matter. The initial options that he had weighed

seemed to have been Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. In fact, his early preference was in relation to Sikhism. After long years of thought on the matter, however, he finally decided to accept Buddhism. His acceptance of Buddhism shortly before his death was not simply a matter of a religious choice, going for an alternative, more egalitarian religion. It was essentially a social choice and was inextricably linked to his struggle for social justice. Together, the political and religious struggles were like two pillars of the single effort to attain social justice for the untouchables. It was a unique example of welding together two distinct languages of struggles, the traditional language of religious protest and the modern language of participatory democracy.

15.8 Conclusion

Today, Ambedkar's legacy still lives on. His struggles for social justice continue to inspire many. As dalits come forth in India and abroad in support of their demands for human rights, Ambedkar remains an icon.

No single strand of dalit movement can claim the sole inheritance of Ambedkar. From the purely political claims to the Ambedkarite legacy as manifest in the struggles of the Republican Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party to the neo-Buddhist converts in search for an alternative identity of dignity, the entire spectrum of Ambedkarite following is indeed mind-boggling.

Today, bearing the legacy of Ambedkar, attempting to cope with pressures of globalizations, dalits have moved beyond the borders of India in search of support for their human rights demands.

15.9 Summing Up

- Ambedkar stood for the marginalized people in society, conscious of the exploitation perpetrated on lines of caste and class. The structural inequality of society disturbed him to the core.
- His thoughts inclined towards socialism; yet, he could not make common cause with the socialists of the day.
- Ambedkar had a unique approach. His restlessness in failing to find what he believed to be the correct path through the contemporary socialist movements, found solace in Buddhism.
- Through the path of Buddhism Ambedkar sought to ensure social justice for the oppressed masses.

15.10 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. How would you describe the role that Ambedkar sought to assign to the state pertaining to economic issues ?
2. Do you think Ambedkar can be called a socialist ? Discuss.
3. What were Ambedkar's views on social justice ? Examine.
4. What was the programme of the ILP ?
5. How did Ambedkar seek to achieve social justice?
6. How did Ambedkar compare Marxism with Buddhism?

B. Short Questions :

1. What was Ambedkar's stand on the peasant question?
2. What was Ambedkar's contributions towards the uplift of labour?
3. What was Ambedkar's stand on State Socialism?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQ) :

1. In which writing did Ambedkar present his ideas of an alternative Constitution?

Answer Options:

- (a) The Buddha and his Dhamma (b) Who were the Shudras?
(c) States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India
(d) The Annihilation of Caste

Ans. (c)

2. In which year did Ambedkar join hands with the communists to call a strike against the Industrial Disputes Act?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1935 (b) 1937
(c) 1938 (d) 1940

Ans. (c)

3. In which year did Ambedkar form Independent Labour Party?

Answer Options:

- (a) 1936 (b) 1937
(c) 1940 (d) 1941

Ans. (a)

4. In which speech did Ambedkar criticize Marxism?

Answer Options:

- (a) Buddha and Karl Marx (b) Buddha and Socialism
(c) Buddha and Hinduism (d) None

Ans. (a)

5. Which is not true of Ambedkar's embracing Buddhism?

Answer Options:

- (a) He wanted to ensure social justice for the oppressed masses
(b) He was of the opinion that Buddhism was more egalitarian than Hinduism
(c) He had no doubt that Buddhism was a liberating religion
(d) He embraced Buddhism simply for religious reason

Ans. (d)

15.11 Further Reading

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2. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage, New Delhi, 1994.
3. Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005.
4. Narendra Jadhav, *Dr Ambedkar's Economic Thought and Philosophy*, Popular Prakashani, Bombay, 1993.
5. Debi Chatterjee, *Dalit Rights Human Rights*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2011.
6. K.N. Kadam, compiled and edited, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: A Chronology*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1991.
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Module - 4
Ambedkar and Indian Society

Unit - 16 □ Gandhi-Ambedkar Debate

Structure

16.1 Objective

16.2 Introduction

16.3 Gandhi's views on Caste and the Malaise of Untouchability

16.4 Ambedkar's views on Caste and the Malaise of Untouchability

16.5 Gandhi—Ambedkar Debate

16.6 Conclusion

16.7 Summing Up

16.8 Probable Questions

16.9 Further Reading

16.1 Objective

On going through this Unit, the learners will be able to—

- Locate both Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the context of the later phase of the nationalist struggle of India so as to better understand the specific context within which these mammoths of the period defined and influenced the nationalist struggle.
- Understand what is exactly to be understood as the Gandhi -Ambedkar Debate.
- Arrive at an evaluation regarding the points of contestation and the relative merits of the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar with reference to the core of the debate viz caste.

16.2 Introduction

The discussion on Gandhi—Ambedkar debate has to be entered into with a brief review of backgrounds of Gandhi and Ambedkar and the specific reference to each of their specific views on caste and untouchability. “Gandhi and Ambedkar shared in common total opposition to caste oppression and caste discrimination and commitment to transform the social, economic and cultural condition of the Harijans or the Scheduled Castes.” — as Bipan Chandra writes in his *Essays on Indian Nationalism* (1993). However, the way both went around trying to bring a change in the status of the Untouchables or Depressed Classes was mostly opposed to each other and that is what led to this famous debate.

16.3 Gandhi’s views on Caste system in India and the Malaise of Untouchability

In *Young India*, dated 27 April, 1921, Gandhi (1869-1948) wrote: “... so long as the Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as a part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, Swaraj is impossible of attainment...” Gandhi’s views on the caste system amongst the Hindus had four primary dimensions:

- a) He considered the primary contradiction in Indian society, during the nationalist struggle, to be the contradiction caused by British imperialism in India. All other contradictions were to be considered secondary till such time that India acquired independence from British rule.
- b) Gandhi believed that for a people who had been economically, socially and politically dominated for as long as Indians had, the method of fighting against oppression could not be militant in form because the oppressed people would not be in a position to undertake sustained militant struggle for a long period of time. What was needed was to educate and organise all the suppressed people and train them for ‘prolonged period of preparation’. He suggested the same means of struggle for the Harijans, which means ‘Children of God’, a name that Gandhi conferred upon the Untouchables.

- c) Gandhi believed that without the mass support and active participation of the caste Hindus, no effective and real change could be brought about in the position and fate of the 'panchama's, the fifth caste in the Hindu caste structure. For this to happen, he proposed that the caste Hindus would have to be made aware of the extremely dehumanizing effect that the practice of untouchability had brought upon the outcastes. They should be convinced that the Hindus could only become capable of realising 'Swaraj' if and when they could accept all humans as their equals. Moreover, the Harijans being a numerical minority would find it difficult to combat and defeat the caste Hindus in direct, militant combat.
- d) Gandhi also believed that the final economic improvement of the untouchables was not possible without the overall economic improvement of Indian society. He considered the caste system to be guilty of having divided the Hindu society and therefore of having prevented any united opposition to all forms of oppression meted out by the British. He opposed the demand for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes on the ground that such a political and constitutional arrangement would tear at the very 'social fabric' of Indian society and push the Untouchables to perpetual segregation from the mainstream of Hindu society. He wanted the practice of untouchability to be erased from the Hindu system of life and gave a call to all caste Hindus to 'become Harijans'.
- e) Gandhi also proposed the creation of the Harijan Sevak Sangh or Society for the Service of Harijans which he proposed should be headed by 'savarna' or caste Hindus to undertake measures to redress the grievances of the Harijans. In the issue of Harijan, dated 5 January, 1934, Gandhi wrote: "The Board has been formed to enable savarna (upper caste) Hindus to do repentance and reparation to you. It is thus a Board of Debtors, and therefore, so far as this Board is concerned, the initiative has to come from the debtors. You have to certify whether the debtors discharge their obligation or not. What you have to do is to enable and help them to discharge their obligations; that is to say, you can tell them how to discharge their obligation, you can tell them what in your opinion will satisfy the great body of Harijans."

- f) Gandhi provided two ways to bring about harijan emancipation: temple entry and economic uplift. Both had to be acquired through leadership and active cooperation of the caste Hindus.
- g) Javamanuja Bandyopadhyaya in his book *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi* (1969) succinctly summarizes Gandhi's views on untouchability, caste and vama (p160). He writes. "He (Gandhi) regards untouchability as "immoral". and therefore in need of complete eradication, caste as unnecessary and undesirable, though not "immoral", and vama as a natural institution, necessary and highly desirable, if not indispensable, for the organization of human society." In other words, Gandhi considered *vamashrama* as a natural classification of society based on the inner qualities or '*guna*' of the individuals that helped sort people with similar qualities into groups. In Gandhi's opinion, these groups were absolutely equal in status, with none being higher or lower than the other. As far as castes are concerned, Gandhi felt that the caste system was the natural manifestation of the *vamas* or the four-fold division of Hindu society into the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. His opinion regarding the caste system was rather ambivalent though he did not support the innumerable sub-castes and sub-sub-castes that had evolved over time in Hindu society. As far as Untouchability was concerned. Gandhi was repulsed by both the term and its implications. He felt that the concept and practice of untouchability violated the ideals of Equality, Freedom and Non violence that lay at the very core of Hindu Sanatan Dharma. He proposed that this abominable practice be abolished from the very root of Indian society and that would automatically cleanse the Hindu caste system of the greatest malaise that had crept into it.

16.4 Ambedkar's views on Caste System and the Malaise of Untouchability

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891—1956) had been born in the untouchable Mahar community of Maharashtra and had lived the fate of countless Untouchables for the major part of his life. He experienced the pain and humiliation of being an Untouchable in India and did not have to learn about their existential crisis through socialisation – political or otherwise. For him, the struggle or fight against untouchability and the

caste structure within Hinduism was not one of the many agendas within the nationalist movement but it was rather an issue that needed resolution on an emergency basis, even before the resolution of the imperial rule in India.

His views on Caste system and Untouchability may be understood thus:

- a) Ambedkar, in his famous (undelivered) speech, later published as a booklet, *Annihilation of Caste*, wrote that “the caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers.” He went further ahead to write that this division of labourers was not just a division but a hierarchy in which “the division of labourers are graded one above the other. The worst part of caste system was that it was hereditary and confined men to certain professions, not based upon their ability or preference, but on the basis of their birth.
- b) He looks upon the hereditary caste system as particularly pernicious in the context of an industrialized economy because by not allowing the readjustment of professions by choice and ability in an industrialized society, a huge number of people were being rendered unemployed.
- c) Ambedkar also found the purity-pollution matrix on which the caste system and untouchability rested, to be rather unscientific. He cited the works of ethnologists like D. R. Bhandarkar, who in his paper ‘Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population’ stated that “There is hardly a class or a caste in India which has not a foreign strain in it.” He found the claim that caste helps maintain racial purity also to be flawed and unscientific. Ambedkar looked upon the imperatives of caste system against inter-marriage and inter-dining to be a conspiracy to exclude a particular section of the population from having access to equal amounts of resources, whether economic, social, political or cultural.
- d) Ambedkar held the caste system responsible for keeping the Hindus divided and therefore weakened. The extreme obsession with caste status and caste consciousness amongst the Hindus were responsible for creating and perpetuating the lack of Hindu oneness that was not to be found amongst the Sikhs and Mohammedans. This, he considered to be one of the main reasons for the Hindus being unable to create a strong front of resistance against all

sorts of political and military onslaughts since medieval times. The caste conscious Hindu hardly ever thought on national lines because of its adherence to a divisive caste structure.

- e) Ambedkar accused the caste system of instilling an anti-social element within Hinduism because each caste and sub-caste tried to maintain its purity by remaining aloof and standing off from issues that affected 'others', people not belonging to their own caste or sub caste. "Caste has killed public spirit" he said in the *Annihilation of the Caste*. The concept of charity existed in Hinduism but was once again practiced within the folds of one's own caste. This, Ambedkar found to be deplorable.
- f) Till 1935 Ambedkar's work took three directions: (1) to Educate, Organize and Agitate the Untouchables. He realised that the Untouchables would 'have to be their own light'. In this he did not want to depend upon the leadership of the caste Hindus. He wanted to organize the Depressed or Suppressed classes and involve them in active participation in political agitations, to voice their own demands, to protest against the oppressions that they faced every day, everywhere. With this aim in mind he founded the Independent Labour Party in 1937, the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 and organized three satyagrahas of mass import. (2) He did not rely upon Hinduism to reform itself and therefore made constant efforts to stay in communication with the British, to petition, critique and argue the case for the Untouchables. He participated in and voiced his opinion at every given opportunity, whether at the Southborough Committee on Franchise (1919), The Simon Commission (1928) or while attending the Round Table Conferences (1930-32). (3) the third area of emphasis in Ambedkar's works was the initiative to educate the Untouchables. Here, the influence of Jyotirao Phule on Ambedkar is evident. Phule, one of the earliest leaders of the Untouchables had famously said that "Without education knowledge was lost; without knowledge development is lost, without development wealth is lost; without wealth Shudras are ruined." (1890) Ambedkar established hostels for untouchables to stay in while attending school and later by establishing a network of colleges under the People's Education Society.

16.5 The Gandhi - Ambedkar Debate:

The main crux of the Gandhi – Ambedkar debate revolves around the question of accepting separate electorates for the Untouchables which were granted to the Untouchables through the Communal Award by Ramsay MacDonald, wherein the Untouchables were treated as a minority, distinct from the rest of Hindu Society. This debate arose and unfolded during the Round Table Conferences that took place in Britain between 1930 and 1932. These conferences were organized chiefly to discuss the nature of political independence and the nature of the Constitution that India should have in the post- Second World War scenario in return for the help offered to the British during war. These Conferences were being held because the demand for Swaraj or self- rule by Indians were growing stronger every day and also because the report of The Simon Commission had suggested the same. All sections of the Indian population and the princely states were represented. The First Round Table Conference proved to be a failure in the absence of leaders of Indian National Congress and the big industrialists, mostly because most of them were under arrest for having participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi. This conference was largely ineffective, with idea of an All India Federation being launched by Tej Bahadur Sapru. The Muslim League accepted this proposal. The Princely States too accepted the idea of an All India Federation provided their internal autonomy was left uncompromised.

To make the Second Round Table Conference more effective and to ensure the participation of Indian National Congress and Gandhi the Gandhi—Irwin Pact was signed. This pact ensured the British of Gandhi calling off the Civil Disobedience Movement and representing the INC in the Second Round Table Conference in lieu of lifting the ban on Congress, release of all political prisoners except those engaged in political violence, and the recognition of the right of Indians in coastal areas to produce and exchange salt, locally. Gandhi took particular offence at the Communal Award formulated by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald which granted separate electorates to the Untouchables and thereby recognized them as separate from the rest of Hindu society. He resolved henceforth to work only for the Untouchables. He embarked on a fast unto death till this system of separate electorates was given up by the Untouchables and their leader, Ambedkar. After resisting giving into Gandhi's

mode of creating pressure, Ambedkar finally gave in when Gandhi's health started to deteriorate. The Poona Pact was signed in 1932, between Ambedkar on behalf of all the Depressed Classes and Madan Mohan Malviya on behalf of all the caste Hindus and Gandhi. This pact ensured that seats in provincial legislatures would be reserved for the Depressed Classes and that they would also have to form an electoral college to decide on their representatives who would contest elections on their behalf. The caste Hindus were also placed under compulsion to desist from practicing untouchability and to adopt the Depressed Classes as one of their own. The Poona Pact was a sad compromise for Ambedkar who had demanded separate electorates for the Depressed Classes so as to ensure adequate representation of the Untouchables in the legislature, administrative positions so that real and effective changes could be brought about in the lives of these people. Though the Pact promised that no member of the Depressed Classes would face any disability with regard to appointment to any representative body or public service, it provided no guarantee of redress in case of such occurrences.

The reforms suggested in the Second Round Table Conference took the shape of the Government of India Act, 1935. The Third Round Table Conference was once again toothless because neither Indian National Congress nor the Labour Party participated in it.

16.6 Conclusion

The Gandhi—Ambedkar Debate revolved around whether the caste Hindus could be trusted to lead the correction of wrongs inflicted upon the Depressed Classes or whether they should depend upon themselves to improve their lot. While Gandhi refused to do away with the caste system in its entirety and proposed reforms within the Hindu caste structure to do away with the pernicious practice of untouchability, Ambedkar refused such help and charity. He had no faith in Hinduism to reform itself. He preferred the path of self help for the Depressed Classes, through organization and agitation, whether social, economic or political. Gandhi's benevolence in calling the hitherto 'unseeable', 'untouchable' shudras as 'Harijans' was perhaps repugnant and ridiculous to Ambedkar who proudly proclaimed that though he was born a Hindu, he would not die one. Moreover, having met with success in securing separate electorates for the Depressed Classes through the Communal Award, to give it up for reservation of seats was also not agreeable to him.

16.7 Summing Up

- This unit has discussed the core idea behind the Gandhi—Ambedkar debate: caste and untouchability.
- It has discussed the Gandhian view of caste as an integral part of Hindu religion, his distaste and dislike for the practice of untouchability, his efforts to eradicate this menace of Hinduism and the various means he suggests for the erasure of untouchability and incorporation of the Depressed Classes into the four fold caste structure of Hinduism.
- The next section has discussed Ambedkar’s views on Hindu caste system, the practice of untouchability and the need for the ‘dalits’ or untouchable to get organized, educated and to conduct struggles for their own emancipation and progress.
- The unit has then discussed the Gandhi- Ambedkar debate on caste and has highlighted the exact points of difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar with regards to their understanding of caste.

16.8 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. What were the key points of the Gandhi Irwin Pact?
2. What were the major outcomes of the Third Round Table Conference?
3. Discuss the main issues related to Gandhi- Ambedkar Debate.
4. Why were the Round Table Conferences held?
5. Why did the First and Third Round table Conference Fail?
6. What efforts did Gandhi make to improve the lot of the outcaste Hindus?

B. Short Questions :

1. How did Gandhi look at the caste system within Hinduism?
2. What solution did Gandhi have in mind for the problems caused by caste system?
3. How did Ambedkar view the Hindu caste system?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQS) :

1. Who was associated with 'Young India'?

Answer Options:

- (a) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (b) M. K. Gandhi
(c) Jawaharlal Nehru (d) None of these

Ans. (b)

2. Which name did Gandhiji confer on the untouchables?

Answer Options:

- (a) Girijan (b) Harijan
(c) Bahujan (d) None of these

Ans. (b)

3. Who said, "the caste system is not merely a division of labour, it is also a division of labourers"?

Answer Options:

- (a) M. K. Gandhi (b) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
(c) Dr. Rajendra Prasad (d) J. L. Nehru

Ans. (b)

4. Which was the main crux of Gandhi-Ambedkar debate?

Answer Options:

- (a) Separate electorate for the Muslims
(b) Separate electorate for the Sikhs
(c) Separate electorate for the untouchables
(d) None

Ans. (c)

5. Who said, "I was born a Hindu, but would not die one"?

Answer Options:

- (a) Mahatma Gnadhi (b) B. R. Ambedkar
(c) J. L. Nehru (d) None

Ans. (b)

16.9 Further Reading

1. Jadhav, N. (ed) (2014): *Ambedkar Writes*, Vol I, New Delhi, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
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Unit - 17 **Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia**

Structure

17.1 Objective

17.2 Introduction

17.3 Ram Manohar Lohia and B. R. Ambedkar : On Caste

17.4 Ram Manohar Lohia and B. R. Ambedkar : On Socialism

17.5 Conclusion

17.6 Summing Up

17.7 Probable Questions

17.8 Further Reading

17.1 Objective

After studying this unit, the learners will be acquainted with—

- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia in the quest for social justice in India.
- Lohia's thoughts on caste, socialism, social justice
- Ambedkar's thoughts on caste, socialism, social justice
- The similarities and differences in the thoughts of Ambedkar and Lohia.

17.2 Introduction

Ram Manohar Lohia (1910 – 1967) was a leader of the lower castes and a frontline freedom fighter. He was also an ardent follower of Gandhi and resembled Gandhi more than Nehru did after the demise of Gandhi. He was also deeply influenced by the ideas of Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, both stalwarts of the nationalist struggle of India.

Lohia was involved in the nationalist struggle and an ardent follower of Gandhi. Ram Manohar Lohia met Gandhi at the very young age of ten and was deeply

influenced by the latter. So much so, that when Gandhi gave the first call for Non-Cooperation, Lohia suspended his education for a span of about one year to participate in the movement. After completing his primary education in his native village, Lohia was admitted to the Marwari School in Bombay to finish his school education. For higher education, Lohia first went to Benaras but later took admission to the Vidyasagar College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta, from where he completed his graduation course, affiliated to the University of Calcutta, from where he completed his graduation course. This period of time between 1927 to 1929 was very significant. While the Indian national Congress was still predominantly influenced by Gandhi, this period also saw the rise of the socialist views of Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and others within the arena of the Congress. Students' politics, which was a significant part of the nationalist movement, played a very important part in nationalist politics and attracted Lohia, like many others of his time.

Lohia returned to India in 1933 after completing his doctoral degree from Germany. He played a major role in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, under the aegis of the Indian National Congress alongside Jawaharlal Nehru, Minoo Masani, Jayprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta and others. During the same year he took up the editorship of the weekly newspaper: 'Congress Socialist'. It must be noted here that all members of the CSP were not Marxists and most were considerably distanced by the activities of Communists in India during that period. He started participating in the annual session of the Congress, participated in the Quit India movement. He was arrested in 1944 and subjected to extreme torture. In 1946, he was released from prison and he joined the freedom struggle in Goa as a satyagrahi and courted arrest once again. In 1952, Lohia founded the Praja Socialist Party by merging Socialist Party and Acharya Kripalani's Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. He constantly maintained the need for PSP to maintain equidistance from both the Congress and the Communists so as continue struggle against truly socialist and Gandhian principles. His main writings include: *The Caste System* (1964), *Guilty Men of India's Partition* (1970), *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* (1963) and many more.

For purpose of the present unit we shall look into two main ideas: Caste and Socialism and try to understand the similarities and differences in the views of Ambedkar and Lohia.

17.3 Ram Manohar Lohia and B. R. Ambedkar : On Caste

Similarities:

Both Ambedkar and Lohia have identified similar negative effects of caste system. Both felt that caste system was responsible for a number of evils that afflicted Indian society, from economic stagnation to cultural degeneration and even vulnerability to external attacks. Ambedkar argued that caste ensured neither preservation of racial purity, nor improved mental capacities. He accused the caste system of having completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus. It had let Hindus remain aloof from their own co-religionists and created such conditions wherein Hindus lost all semblance of cultural unity because of their obsession with their caste identity. Lohia too emphasized upon this segregation within Hinduism caused by the caste system. He recognizes the need for ‘communication within the community’ as essential for national progress but he saw “a black sadness prevails, for there is no novelty, no possibility of free conversation between the priests and the shoemaker.” Both Ambedkar and Lohia have also recognized that caste system was at the root of the economic stagnation in India because it left no scope for innovation in industry or agricultural spheres. Moreover, it created a mental barrier between the intellectual labourers and the manual labourers, which created and perpetuated economic disparities and social stagnation in India. Ambedkar had also similarly pointed out that caste system was opposed to industrialization efforts because it left no space for readjustment of profession based on skill or merit as was required in industrialized economies. Caste system, once it became rigid and determined by birth, controlled and chose the profession one could engage in. Caste determined profession on the basis of birth and not of skill or merit. This led to large scale unemployment in country as densely populated as India.

Differences:

With reference to caste, Lohia remains largely silent and when he does address the issue at all, he reiterates Gandhi’s view that for a deeply religious people like the Hindus, the caste system could not be broken or done away with in its totality because it was rooted in religion. Hinduism ought to be reformed of this vice. He did acknowledge that the caste system had exploited the ‘panchamas’ beyond measure and had excluded them most unfairly from access to the most basic necessities of human existence and therefore of human dignity. He looked upon the Brahmins and the Banias for creating a caste nexus that perpetuated exclusion of the lower castes

from access to resources – social, political and economic. He further acknowledged the role that Ambedkar had played in his efforts to emancipate the Dalits but expressed distress at the fact that Ambedkar had not been able to rise above being a leader of the Dalits to becoming a leader of all non- Dalits, especially the aboriginal tribes. He saw Ambedkar’s failure to emerge as a leader of all oppressed people of India and also blamed him for forging an aggressively exclusive identity for the Dalits as distinct from all other minorities in India. This would, in the long run, create space for more divisive politics and more electoral politics in India, according to Lohia. It would not be too far-fetched to speculate that being born and raised in the Hindi heartland of the country and experiencing numerous revivalist attempts of Hinduism he found it difficult to decry Hinduism altogether, as Ambedkar had done. So for Lohia the ‘annihilation of caste’ was impossible. He had come very close to Gandhi during the nineteen thirties and a lot of similarity may be noted in his ideas regarding Hinduism and caste system with Gandhi. Interestingly, for Lohia, Ambedkar himself was a source of inspiration in his fight against caste system. He said “Dr Ambedkar was to me, a great man in Indian politics, and apart from Gandhiji, as great as the greatest of caste Hindus. This fact had always given me solace and confidence that the caste system of Hinduism could one day be destroyed.”

The next obvious question that arises is how has caste system managed to survive in India? Lohia’s understanding is that caste, with all its pernicious effects had a legitimizing aspect to it. Arun Kumar Pattanaik in his article “Lohia’s Immanent Critique of Caste” (2008) has pointed out that Lohia had identified a Gramscian kind of hegemony in the functioning of the caste structure in India. The lower castes and even the outcastes were convinced of the mental superiority of the upper castes and the Hindu doctrine of ‘Karmavaad’ was used to forge into the minds of the lower castes and upper castes that their present lives were fashioned according to the fruits of actions they performed in their previous births. The Indian epics, myths, folk tales are full of tales that propagate this view of cycles of birth and rebirth where each successive birth is determined by the results of actions/ karma of the previous births. Thus a combination of spontaneous consent extracted from the lower castes and an element of domination and coercion exercised by the upper castes led to creation of a Gramscian kind of ‘hegemony’ of the upper castes that helped to perpetuate the caste system in India.

Ambedkar on the other hand, was of the opinion that the long intellectual enslavement and physical deprivation of the Dalits and the ‘structures of domination’ within Hinduism were responsible for the continued existence of caste system in India.

He found this system to be so deeply entrenched in the Hindu psyche and society that he saw no alternative but to denounce and if necessary, to give up Hinduism altogether, in order to forge a separate identity and existence of the Dalits in India.

17.4 Ram Manohar Lohia and B. T. Ambedkar : On Socialism

Similarities:

Both Ambedkar and Lohia were of the opinion that economic reforms could not be sufficiently and successfully brought about if social and political reforms were absent or inadequate in a country like India. Both were critical of Communists who interpreted the Indian reality on economic lines without referring to the caste question. Ambedkar explicitly wrote that if “the source of power and domination is, at any given time or in any given society, social and religious, then social reform and religious reform must be accepted as necessary sort of reform.” For all Socialists attempting to make Socialism a reality in India, Ambedkar’s advice was to “kill the monster” of caste without which no amount of social, economic or political reform could truly be effective in India.

Interestingly, Lohia, himself a socialist, took a similar view of the link between caste and establishment of socialism in India. He was sure that unless Hinduism was cleansed of its ‘rubbish like caste’ socialism would be superficial and ineffective at the best even if it were established in India. Without social reform, political and economic reforms were bound to fail. He wrote in the Caste System (1964) that even after completing economic and political reform, the high castes “would continue to supply the managers of the state and industry. The mass of the people would be kept in a state of perpetual physical and mental lowliness, at least comparatively... But the position of the high caste would then be justified on the grounds of ability and in economic terms as it is now on grounds of birth or talent.... What it loses in respect of caste by birth, it gains in respect of caste by merit.”

Differences:

However, there is some difference between Ambedkar and Lohia on the question of socialism in India as well. While Ambedkar looked at the problem of caste alone as a threat and a challenge to the establishment of socialism in India, Lohia went further ahead to consider that the same consideration should be extended to all lower

castes and not just the Dalits and also to women's rights in India. It should be noted that Lohia took a far more holistic view of the Indian society and his vision of Social Reform was more comprehensive and deeply reflective of all the problems affecting Indian society.

17.5 Conclusion

This unit has dealt with the similarities and differences in the ideas of two of India's leaders of the marginalized. It is interesting to note that despite being contemporaries and working for the outcastes and the lower castes, they never joined forces nor interacted directly during their lifetime. It would therefore be interesting to speculate what course the social justice movement in India might have taken had Ambedkar and Lohia joined forces.

17.6 Summing Up

- Ambedkar and Lohia both regarded caste as a definite flaw in Hinduism and traced similar flaws and problems that resulted from this pernicious system. Yet the two had different views on how to solve the problem of caste system in India. While Ambedkar refused to stay within the folds of Hinduism and concentrated upon creating a separate and exclusive identity of the Dalits, Lohia believed in reforming Hinduism as a way to solve the problems created by caste system.
- Both Ambedkar and Lohia supported the belief that social and political reform were essential preconditions for the effective implementation of socialist system of production and distribution of resources in India. However, Ambedkar wanted socialists to annihilate the monster of caste alone before seeking socialist reforms while Lohia included the reform of both caste and gender situations in India for effective establishment of socialism in India.

17.7 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Point out the similarities between Lohia and Ambedkar with reference to their views on caste.

2. Point out the similarities between Lohia and Ambedkar with reference to their views on establishment of socialism in India.
3. Who would you consider to be a greater leader of the untouchables in India – Lohia or Ambedkar? Give reasons in support of your answer.
4. Discuss Lohia's views regarding the role that Ambedkar played in India as a leader of the Dalits.
5. Do you find any similarities in the views of Gandhi and Lohia with regard to their views on caste system in India? Give reasons for your answer.
6. What role does Ambedkar accord to social and political reforms as a precondition to establishing socialism in India?

B. Short Questions :

7. Discuss briefly Ram Manohar Lohia's role as a leader of the lower castes in India.
8. What was Ambedkar's views regarding the caste system?
9. Discuss Ambedkar's views regarding establishment of socialism in India.

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQS) :

1. Who is the author of the book, "Marx, Gandhi and Socialism"?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar | (b) Ram Monahar Lohia |
| (c) Acharya Kripalani | (d) Jayprakash Narayan |

Ans. (b)

2. In which year was Praja Socialist Party established?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1950 | (b) 1952 |
| (c) 1955 | (d) 1957 |

Ans. (b)

3. Lohia views on caste were similar to

Answer Options:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| (a) B. R. Ambedkar | (b) Mahatma Gandhi |
| (c) Jotirao Phule | (d) None of these |

Ans. (a)

4. What is not true about Ambedkar's views on socialism?

Answer Options:

- (a) Social reforms were necessary for implementing socialism
- (b) Political reforms were necessary for implementing socialism
- (c) Annihilation of caste is necessary for implementing socialism
- (d) Revolution is necessary for implementing socialism

Ans. (d)

5. Who is the author of the book, "Makers of Modern India"?

Answer Options:

- (a) Ram Chandra Guha
- (b) Bidyut Chakrabarty
- (c) R. K. Pandey
- (d) R. K. Mishra

Ans. (a)

17.8 Further Reading

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Unit - 18 □ Ambedkar and Nehru

Structure

18.1 Objective

18.2 Introduction

18.3 Caste in India: views of B.R. Ambedkar and J.L. Nehru

18.4 Socialism in India: views of B.R. Ambedkar and J.L. Nehru

18.5 Conclusion

18.6 Summing Up

18.7 Probable Questions

18.8 Further Reading

18.1 Objective

After going through this unit, the learners will be familiar with—

- the views of Ambedkar and Nehru on the caste system
- socialist ideas of Nehru and Ambedkar
- ideological orientation of Nehru and Ambedkar

18.2 Introduction

This unit is particularly interesting because it seeks to explore the role and ideas of two of the closest contenders to the title of ‘Maker of Modern India’ – Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Nation building is of course a mammoth task and one can rarely, if at all come across a nation built through the efforts of a single individual. It has always been a result of collaborative and collective efforts of many national spirited personalities that result in building a nation. And India is still a nation in the making. Yet, it cannot be denied that some people contribute significantly more than others in shaping a nation than others do. Nehru and Ambedkar are, in this sense,

the closest contenders to the title mentioned above. Both men came from as diverse backgrounds as imaginable. Nehru was born to a Kashmiri Pundit family of renown and considerable wealth, an erudite, rationalist father and nationalist – Motilal Nehru and a devout Hindu mother – Swarup Rani Kaul. He received western education from the best institutions in the West and had the rare opportunity of growing up in a home that had running water, electricity, a tennis court and a swimming pool, attended to by servants and completed by an English governess and home tutor. He returned from his foreign education in 1912 and joined the Indian National Congress following his father. On the other hand, we have Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, born to the untouchable Mahar community in Maharashtra to Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai, both hailing from untouchable communities in Maharashtra. Fourteenth child of the Sakpal family, Ambedkar faced all the disabilities that the Untouchables of his time were destined to face. All his trials and tribulations have become common knowledge now. Fate had other plans for this untouchable boy. Under the kind sponsorship of the Gaekwad of Baroda and the maharaja of Kolhapur, Ambedkar succeeded in becoming the first untouchable to complete his Phd in economics from Columbia University, New York and a D.Sc. from University of London and also a degree in law from Grey's Inn. Ambedkar returned to India in 1923 and plunged into the task of organizing the Dalits. This unit shall deal with the views of Ambedkar and Nehru on caste and socialism in India.

18.3 Caste in India: Views of J. L. Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar

The views of Ambedkar on caste have already been discussed in details in the preceding two units and shall be briefly summarised here. He believed the caste system to be an inalienable part of Hinduism and one that could not be removed through taking up mere religious reforms. He considered caste system to be the main reason behind the division amongst the Hindus of India, their economic and political weakness and stagnation. He blamed caste system for having dehumanised the Hindus for not taking responsibility for the ill fate of their co-religionists. He was of the opinion that Indian civilization could not call itself a civilization since it had permitted the existence of untouchability towards the outcastes or Dalits and the existence of so called 'criminal tribes', later known as the Scheduled Tribes to exist in deplorable conditions without making any efforts to 'civilize' them. He was of the opinion that

the outcastes would have to fight for their own emancipation and should not depend upon the initiative of the upper caste Hindus for amelioration of their living conditions. He therefore sought to educate, agitate and organize the untouchables in a manner that they become capable of agitating for their own rights. He insisted that untouchable men and women participate in political meetings, become conscious about their own plight, and fight collectively to express their political opinion and gain human rights for themselves. He established numerous hostels for Dalit students and colleges under the sponsorship of People's Education Society so as to promote education amongst the Untouchables. He considered education to be of utmost priority in ensuring that the Dalits could fight for themselves. He proposed decrying Hinduism altogether in order to successfully annihilate caste.

Nehru on the other hand, hardly discussed the issue of caste in India. A liberal rationalist and humanist by nature, he was hardly concerned even with the notion of religion. He may be described as an atheist or at best an agnostic. In the pages of *Discovery of India*, he merely mentions that the word 'Hindu' is of foreign origin and that initially the caste system in India was not based on birth but on profession. In the later Vedic period the caste system began to become rigid and hereditarily determined. In this book Nehru writes: "when the Aryans forayed into India, they defeated the Dravidians, who were the inhabitants of this land. The victory was both racial and political.... The struggle between the Aryans and the Dravidians gave birth to the caste system." This caste system was dominated by the priestly classes. This domination continued up to the end of the Upanishadic era when India witnessed many intellectual revolutions that triggered the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, which were rebellions within the fold of Hinduism. Both Buddhism and Jainism failed to attack caste system directly but preached equality and brotherhood of men. This, according to Nehru, weakened the hold of caste on the mass psyche. Being a secular democrat at heart, Nehru failed to notice the debilitating effect that religion and caste system had on large sections of Indians.

18.4 Socialism in India: Views of B.R. Ambedkar and J. L. Nehru

Ambedkar's views on socialism may be found in his book *State and Minorities*. His, was a unique brand of socialism that defies categorization. His socialism was developed in the specific context of Indian society and economy. He was against all forms of inequalities, whether social or economic or political. He wrote that the small

size of land holdings in India was largely responsible for the stagnation in agriculture. He advised that these small land holdings should be consolidated to enhance the agricultural productivity. Ambedkar also noticed the deep interrelation between caste and poverty in India. He was acutely conscious of the fact that the outcastes and the lowest castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy were inextricably caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. He exhorted the state to ensure, that irrespective of caste status, poverty could be removed from India. He suggested progressive taxation as a means to ensure greater income of the state by means of revenue collected and greater redistribution of this increased revenue for the betterment of the poor. Ambedkar further exhorted the 'equality of the castes' or similar treatment for similarly placed people. His variety of socialism was economic as well as social. His ideal society, by his own admission, was a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Only such a society could function on lines of parliamentary democracy where no section of its population was deprived of its fundamental human rights based on birth, caste, class and such other parochial considerations. He proposed that big industries in independent India should be owned and managed by the state. Private ownership of property was not disallowed but restricted to small industries and small landholdings.

What Ambedkar proposed was that inalterable state socialism should be made a part of the Indian Constitution so that no matter which political party acquired power through democratic elections, the process of equitable distribution of national resources could continue unhindered. At a philosophical level it is also important at this juncture to understand, in brief, what Ambedkar's views were on Marxism and the Communist Movement in India during his time. We must note that Ambedkar agreed with some of the basic tenets of Marxism like: (a) The purpose of philosophy is to change the world and not to stop at a mere explanation of the origin of it. (b) Conflict of interest between various classes in society is a fact, (c) The institution of ownership of private property is at the base of exploitation of one class by another and (d) The eradication of private property would be absolutely essential in order to create an exploitation-free society. However, Ambedkar is quick to point out that Marxism could not solve the problems of Indian society, polity and economy because the roots of inequality in India were based in religion and not in economic disparities alone. He rejected the economic determinism of Marxism and pointed out that exploitation and inequalities in India had multiple dimensions: social, economic, religious and political. He explicitly pointed out that in India, caste and poverty were inextricably linked. The low castes and outcastes were constantly trapped in the cycle of poverty and no amount of structural or policy changes could work effectively to eradicate poverty amongst these castes unless the very system of caste hierarchy was broken down. Moreover,

the insistence upon violent revolutionary means of social change and the singular focus upon class as a social category made Marxism unfit for Hindu India according to Ambedkar. His views on the Communist Movement in India can also be understood from the above discussion. Though Ambedkar was not in opposition to Marxism or Communism, rather, he held the doctrine quite dear, yet, at a philosophical level his affinity for equality, liberty and rights and also his deep understanding of the Indian society, helped him recognize that any changes in Indian society would have to begin not through structural corrections of class relations but through changes in the social psychological construction of caste. Laws and policies could only aid this process. In this context, Ambedkar's book, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, would be an interesting read.

Nehru believed that a socialist society could only exist in a democratic state. He was of the notion that political democracy would automatically usher in social democracy. Like Ambedkar, he too supported the state ownership of big and basic industries. He was a supporter of mixed economy, where big industries and large landholdings would be under state ownership and small industries and landholdings under private ownership. Nehru was firmly convinced that socialism was the solution to all problems of India and the world. He further clarified that he used the term socialism in its most scientific and meaningful sense. He wanted to replace the profit-oriented system of production with cooperative service. As the longest standing Prime Minister of independent India, Nehru was in a position to implement his ideas on economy more effectively and did give a distinctly socialist orientation to the Indian economy in the years immediately succeeding independence.

18.5 Conclusion

The above discussion clearly states the stark difference between Ambedkar and Nehru as far as caste as an issue affecting the lives of people in India and also shows relatively more similarities in their views on socialism and socialist economy in India. In case of the latter, a minor difference may still be noted: Ambedkar insisted that social and political reform were to precede economic reforms along socialist lines whereas Nehru believed that political democracy would bring about social democracy and all other conditions that were required to establish socialism in all spheres of life of the people. Ambedkar was a reformer and a leader of the Dalits primarily, while Nehru was the visionary who looked at and addressed the macro issues of economics and politics and refused to pay any attention to any other problems that he could brush under the carpet of macro-terms like parliamentary democracy, socialist and mixed economy, secularism, sovereign republic. "Ambedkar's nationalism was expressed

in all his life's work, in the programmes of his various political parties, in his political decisions, in the many books and essays he wrote on the problems of caste, of Muslims and minorities, of Pakistan and of women and in his role in the construction of a democratic independent India. He played a major role in the construction of Indian planning, in the formation of irrigation and energy policies, and his work in setting up colleges and educational institutions represented the efforts of all anti-caste leaders to win education as a tool of liberation." – writes Gail Omvedt in the introduction to her book *AMBEDKAR Towards an Enlightened India* (2008). However, the differences between Nehru and Ambedkar on various issues cannot be understood without referring to the resignation of Ambedkar from the Cabinet on September 27, 1951. In a clarification that Ambedkar gave later regarding his resignation, he is extremely honest and frank about the various issues which had ultimately led to his resignation. He had completed 4 years, 1 month and 26 days as Law Minister in the first Cabinet of independent India under the Prime Ministership of Nehru. It was a post that failed to excite him, for though he was by training a barrister, his specialisation and interest lay primarily in Economics and he desired to hold at least some portfolio that would allow him to affect policy formulation by the new government or put to use his sufficient administrative knack. He was never given any such portfolio, not even if a post fell vacant. A man of his capacities was kept wanting of more work to do, while many other ministers simultaneously held two or three portfolios and were over-worked. During his tenure as Minister for Law, Ambedkar also sadly observed that the position of the Scheduled Castes in independent India was not much better compared to their status in colonial India and this pained him severely. The caste Hindus had not lived up to their promises made during the Poona Pact. Moreover, he had many differences with the government on issues of Foreign Policy that India followed at the moment and the investment made in the defence of the country which he voiced on many occasions but which went unheeded at all times. The last straw that caused him to put in his resignation was the nonchalance of the government towards the Hindu Code Bill. Ambedkar had tried to eradicate inequality on grounds of caste, class and gender through this draft bill but the manner in which this bill was treated the government in spite of the lip service aid to its utility led Ambedkar to resign. Thus, what Ambedkar had gained through the Communal Award and lost to Gandhi through the Poona Pact was once again lost through the defeat of the Hindu Code Bill.

18.6 Summary

- This unit has looked at the contrasting ideas of Ambedkar and Nehru on the impact of caste on Indian people.
- It has also discussed the relatively more similar views of Ambedkar and Nehru on the question of establishing socialism in India, with minor differences of opinion.
- It has aimed to compare the roles and impact of the First Prime Minister and the First Law Minister of independent India in the conclusion section.

18.7 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Compare the views of Nehru and Ambedkar on caste in India.
2. Compare the views of Nehru and Ambedkar on the establishment of socialism in India.
3. Compare the roles of Nehru and Ambedkar in securing rights of lower castes and minorities in independent India.
4. Discuss the role that Nehru played in securing the rights of low caste Hindus in India as the first Prime Minister of independent India.
5. Discuss the role that Ambedkar played in securing the rights of low caste Hindus in India as a member of the Constituent Assembly and as the first Law Minister of independent India.

B. Short Questions :

1. What efforts did Nehru make to implement Socialism in India?
2. What were Nehru's views regarding caste?
3. What were the views of Ambedkar on caste that differed from the views of Nehru?
4. What were Nehru's views regarding socialism in general?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQS) :

1. Who wrote the book, “The Discovery of India”?

Answer Options:

- (a) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (b) Jawaharlal Nehru
(c) Ram Chandra Guha (d) Motilal Nehru

Ans. (b)

2. Between whom was the Poona Pact signed?

Answer Options:

- (a) Between Ambedkar and Nehru (b) Between Gandhi and Nehru
(c) Between Nehru and Patel (d) Between Gandhi and Ambedkar

Ans. (d)

3. Who believed in mixed economy?

Answer Options:

- (a) Mahatma Gandhi (b) Jawaharlal Nehru
(c) B. R. Ambedkar (d) None of them

Ans. (b)

4. In what kind of socialism did Jawaharlal Nehru believe?

Answer Options:

- (a) Scientific socialism (b) Utopian socialism
(c) Guild socialism (d) Democratic socialism

Ans. (d)

5. Who is the author of the book, “Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability”?

Answer Options:

- (a) Bidyut Chakrabarty (b) R. Guha
(c) C. Jaffrelot (d) R. K. Pandey

Ans. (c)

18.8 Further Reading

1. Jadhav, N. (ed) (2014): *Ambedkar Writes*, Vol I, New Delhi, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
2. Keer, D. (2016, 5th Edition): *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Life & Mission*, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan.
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Unit - 19 □ Influence of Ambedkar on Later Dalit Movements

Structure:

- 19.1 Objective**
- 19.2 Introduction**
- 19.3 Neo Buddhism**
- 19.4 Dalit Panthers**
- 19.5 Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti**
- 19.6 Bahujan Samaj Party**
- 19.7 Namantar Andolan**
- 19.8 Conclusion**
- 19.9 Summing Up**
- 19.10 Probable Questions**
- 19.11 Further Reading**

19.1 Objective

This unit shall discuss the influence of Ambedkar on later caste movements in India, namely:

- Navayana-Buddhism
- The formation and activities of the Dalit Panthers
- Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti
- Bahujan Samaj Party
- Namantar Andolan

19.2 Introduction

Ambedkar's final act of defiance and protest against the caste system of Hinduism was his conversion to Buddhism in 1956. He had long ago expressed his intention by

stating that though he had been born a Hindu, he would not die one. During the course of his adult life, he made all kinds of attempts to secure to Dalits their rights as a distinct group of citizens with access to the basic resources and necessities of life. But having failed to achieve this desired status in adequate measure, he converted to Buddhism. Unfortunately, however, he died soon after his act of converting to Buddhism and the latter failed to evoke the kind of mass support or mass conversion that might have been ensured had Ambedkar lived longer.

Ambedkar's death however, did not finish the Dalit movement. He had trained the Dalits well enough to continue fighting for their rights. His faith in the capacity of the Dalits to get organized and continue their fight was vindicated by the latter. In this module we shall discuss briefly some of the organizations that had been formed to fight for the rights of the Dalits and Ambedkar definitely had an influence on them and remained one of the biggest icons of Dalit movements in India.

19.3 Navayana Buddhism

The Dalit Buddhist movement also known as the Navayana Buddhist movement or Buddhist movement was started originally by B.R. Ambedkar. It radically re-invented Buddhism and created a new school of Buddhism known as Navayana. This was an attempt by Ambedkar to adjust the core elements of Buddhism to the social and political needs of the Dalits and to create a platform from which the Dalits could fight oppression and humiliation from caste Hindus. Navayana Buddhism rejected Hinduism and its pernicious caste system which had been at the very root of the suffering and exclusion that the Dalits had been subjected to since the post-Vedic period. It was an outright rejection of the very system that had negated the human status of the Dalits and forced them to lead an animal-like existence.

Mention must be made here of the ideas behind Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism very briefly. He had already mentioned in 1935 at a public meeting in Nashik, Maharashtra, that he intended to give up Hinduism and convert to Buddhism. A year later, at yet another conference held on 30 and 31 May, 1936 in Mumbai, Ambedkar posed some very deep questions to the attending Dalits. He asked why the Dalits chose to continue to identify themselves by a religion that had denied them a dignified human existence and why they had accepted the atrocities inflicted upon

them without protest? He reminded the audience that religion was for man and not man for religion. Since the caste system of Hinduism could not be destroyed without destroying Hinduism itself, the only solution to the problems of the Dalits was the conversion to another religion. They would have to convert in order to organize themselves, set themselves free, live lives of dignity, to enjoy happy domestic lives, allow them to have equal access to public places. He explained that conversion to another religion was not only necessary for the Dalits to break free of the caste hierarchy of Hinduism but also that it was spiritually and materially necessary. Ambedkar insisted that conversion was neither opportunism nor escapism. He exhorted that in order to be treated with dignity by caste Hindus, the Dalits would have to resort to revolutionary means and reformism of any sort would be utterly inadequate. In order to bring about a radical change in the quality of life of the Dalits and to give themselves access to Equality, Dignity and Sympathy, conversion was absolutely necessary. Moreover, conversion to Islam or Christianity would not entirely eradicate the problem of facing caste distinctions, hence, the choice of Buddhism. Buddhism's core values of individual's choice and autonomy, sympathy, equality, rationality, morality and justice also deeply resonated with Ambedkar. Ambedkar set the stage for more thinking and preparation for action amongst lakhs of his co-caste members. Finally, he would convert to Buddhism at a public ceremony in Nagpur on 14 October, 1956, accompanied by more than three and a half lakh other Dalits. After converting to Buddhism, Ambedkar made 22 vows and asked others present there to take these vows which have henceforth become the guiding principles of Navayana Buddhism. These twenty-two vows mainly emphasize upon renouncing Hinduism along with all its major deities, the concept of incarnation of gods, renounced Brahmanic rituals and practices at birth and death accepted the Dhamma of the Buddha as the true religion, the conformity to the Noble Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts but would not consider Buddha to be God. After Ambedkar's death too, the Dalit Buddhists have continued to organize mass conversions so as to ensure that Dalits found an opportunity to lead a life of dignity and they are often found to be targeted by the rightist political parties in India for their open defiance of Hinduism and Hindu Caste structure.

After Ambedkar's death too, the Dalit Buddhists have continued to organize mass conversions so as to ensure that Dalits found an opportunity to lead a life of dignity and they are often found to be targeted by the rightist political parties in India for their open defiance of Hinduism and Hindu Caste structure.

19.4 Dalit Panthers

The Dalit Panthers were founded by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Arup Kamle and J.V. Pawar on 29 May, 1972 in Bombay. This organization was a militant and political reincarnation of the Neo Buddhists and drew many members from the Neo Buddhists. They were influenced by the ideas of Jyoti Rao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar and Karl Marx. The manifesto of the Dalit Panthers clearly makes an attempt to fit Ambedkar's ideas into the Marxist framework and creates a novel roadmap for the struggle of the Dalits to carve out a niche for themselves in the post-independence political discourse of India. The Dalit Panthers were inspired by and borrowed their name from the Black Panthers which was a militant organization of the Blacks, active in the United States of America during the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 60s.

The Dalit Panthers gained renown after Raja Dhale's article 'Kala Swatantrya Din' or the Black Independence Day was published in *Sadhana*, the organization's official publication on 15 August, 1972. The Dalit Panthers gained supporters in the neighbouring states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka. The Panthers included many literary figures and the plays, poems and other literary works became the main medium of communicating the demands and rights of the Panthers.

19.5 Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti

This organization was established on 6 December, 1981 by Kanshi Ram. Give a brief bio-note of Kanshi Ram to organize Dalits and other oppressed classes and fight for their rights. They carried the slogan: "Brahmin, Thakur, bania chor, baki sab hain DS-4". DS-4 was the abbreviated form of Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti. However, this organization was absorbed into the Bahujan Samaj Party also founded by Kanshi Ram in 1984.

Kanshi Ram, more commonly known as 'Bahujan Nayak', 'Manyavar' or 'Saheb', who worked incessantly for the uplift of the Bahujans or the lower caste people, including the Untouchables of India. He also established the All India Backward and Minorities Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) in 1971. Kanshi Ram was born into a Chamar family (one of the innumerable low castes of India) in Ropar district of Punjab. He studied at local schools and completed his graduation course from Government College of Ropar. He secured a government job on reservation.

However, the practical experiences of caste discrimination and the influence of Ambedkar's writings, specially, the Annihilation of Caste, is said to have spurred him on to dive into politics that would ensure the protection of Dalit interests in all walks of life. He is known for his uncompromising attitude as far as Dalit interests were concerned. He was active in state level politics and found electoral success in Uttar Pradesh and gave the state of its most remarkable chief ministers, Mayavati, who was his protege.

19.6 Bahujan Samaj Party

The Bahujan Samaj Party is a national level political party founded by Shri Kanshi Ram on 14 April, 1984. The term 'bahujan' literally translates to mean the majority. Kanshi Ram believed that the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Castes (OBC) along with other religious minorities actually formed a majority of the Indian population but they were divided into numerous castes and sub-castes. The Party claims to be inspired by the philosophy and ideas of Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Narayan Guru, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy and Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj. BSP operates mainly from the state of Uttar Pradesh and won around 19.3% votes in 2019 elections. This party still remains one of the key political players determining Dalit politics and ensuring that their interests are protected.

Mayavati, like her mentor J. Kanshi Ram, was also born into a low caste family and was studying to become an IAS officer when she was spotted by the latter and inducted into the BSP. She was drawn into the whirlwind of politics and went on to become the first Dalit woman chief minister of any Indian state. Her political career is chequered. On one hand she is popularly called 'Behenji' and entrusted with the duty of completing the unfinished work of Kanshi Ram. She has indeed been a voice of the Dalits and has supported reservation in education and jobs, both in the government and private sectors, for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, launched infrastructure building projects in the state of Uttar Pradesh, undertaken initiatives to introduce transparency in administration, maintenance of law and order situations, introduced strict anti -rape laws etc., in order to transform Uttar Pradesh' into what she termed 'Uttam Pradesh'. On the other hand, her statue-making spree and opulent birthday celebrations have attracted negative attention and accusations of corruption amongst her own rank and file. The major opposition to Mayavati and BSP have been the Samajwadi Party which too does caste-based politics.

19.7 Namantar Andolan

The Namantar Andolan was a sixteen year long Dalit Campaign to rename the Marathwada university after Ambedkar in recognition of his contributions towards the cause of the rights of Dalits. The movement was launched on 27 July, 1978 and was successfully completed on 14 January, 1994. The Marathwada University in Aurangabad, Maharashtra was renamed as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University. This movement is an example of a long-drawn social movement with sporadic occurrence of violence but the tenacity of the Dalits was crowned with success in the final phase.

19.8 Conclusion

These are only some of the movements that have been directly influenced by Ambedkar. However, Ambedkar is remembered with reverence wherever a movement is organized against any form of oppression meted out to any section of the population of India. His unique understanding of the caste system in India, the methods suggested by him for the amelioration of the problems of outcastes and the emphasis he laid upon education and organization for giving voice to the masses of excluded and exploited Dalits of India has made him a symbol of defiance of illegitimate and insensitive authority everywhere. His participation in the Constituent Assembly and his efforts to give legal security to the safeguards he had in mind for the Dalits has kept him alive not just in the hearts and minds of the Dalits, but in the hearts and minds of all liberal, secular and democratic citizens of the country.

19.9 Summing Up

This unit has discussed how Ambedkar has influenced the narrative of Dalit movements in independent India by citing some specific organizations and parties like:

- Navayana Buddhism
- Dalit Panthers
- DS-4
- Bahujan Samaj Party
- Namantar Andolan.

19.10 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Discuss the present day Dalit movements in India and also explain Ambedkar's influence on these movements.
2. Who are the Dalit Panthers? What are their main demands?
3. When and by whom was the BSP founded? What were the main objectives of this party?
4. When and why did the Navayana Buddhist movement start?

B. Short Questions :

1. When and why did the namantar andolan begin? Was it successful in achieving its purpose?
2. What is the full form of DS-4? Who founded this organization?

C. Objective Questions (MCQS) :

1. What is Navayana?

Answer Options:

- (a) An old school of Buddhism
- (b) A new school of Buddhism created by the Dalit Buddhist movement led by Dr. Ambedkar
- (c) A school of Buddhism which supported Hindusim
- (d) None

Ans. (b)

2. How many vows did Ambedkar take after converting to Buddhism?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|--------|--------|
| (a) 22 | (b) 23 |
| (c) 24 | (d) 25 |

Ans. (a)

3. In which year was Dalit Panther formed?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| (a) 1970 | (b) 1972 |
| (c) 1975 | (d) 1977 |

Ans. (b)

4. By whom was Bahujan Samaj Party formed?

Answer Options:

- (a) Kanshi Ram (b) Mayavati
(c) Ramdas Athawale (d) None

Ans. (a)

5. Why was Namantar Movement organized?

Answer Options:

- (a) To rename Marathwada University after Gandhi
(b) To rename Marathwada University after Jawaharlal Nehru
(c) To rename Marathwada University after Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
(d) None

Ans. (c)

19.11 Further Readings

1. Jadhav, N. (ed) (2014): *Ambedkar Writes*, Vol I, New Delhi, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
2. Keer, D. (2016, 5th Edition): *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Life & Mission*, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan.
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Unit - 20 □ Contemporary Relevance of Ambedkar

Structure:

20.1 Objective

20.2 Introduction

20.3 Contemporary Relevance of Ambedkar

20.4 Conclusion

20.5 Summing Up

20.6 Probable Questions

20.7 Further Readings

20.1 Objective

This unit shall discuss about the contemporary relevance of Ambedkar to understand :

- Hindu Caste structure in modern India
- Empowerment the outcastes or Dalits to look at themselves as being capable of changing their own conditions.
- Ambedkar's contribution to Indian social and political life

20.2 Introduction

After having gone through the previous units, it hardly remains a question or a matter of doubt whether Ambedkar is relevant to India in the present times. What we may explore however, is the nature and extent to which his ideas, deep understanding of social history, Indian economy, law and religion may help us to solve or at least make better the various ills that still afflict Indian society.

20.3 Contemporary Relevance of Ambedkar

We shall discuss some of the most pertinent points of relevance of Ambedkar's ideas here:

Firstly, how Ambedkar looked at the problem of the outcastes and how he wanted them to look at themselves within the Hindu Caste structure is very significant. It is a much known fact that he was the first person to attempt to organize the untouchables in the most comprehensive and militant manner, he also constantly asked them to organize themselves, without waiting for help from others. Here, Ambedkar is deeply influenced by the Buddhist teaching: “Be your own lamp, seek no other refuge but yourself, Let Truth be your own light.” Ambedkar proposed that the Dalits should rely first and foremost upon themselves in order to solve their own problems and to reclaim their human dignity and worth.

Secondly, Ambedkar realized that the cause of suffering of the low caste Hindus was entrenched in the Hindu religion itself. The Hindu religion in the post- Vedic age, had rendered the caste system rigid by basing it on birth. Thus the caste status of an individual came to be determined by birth and was frozen for all times to come, precluding the possibility of change of status according to individual’s merit, skill and worth. This hierarchical and immutable arrangement of the Hindus determined profession, marriage, norms of social intercourse and had its own body of laws that could not be trifled with. The problem was further accentuated by the fact that caste system was a hierarchy that favoured the upper castes disproportionately. This led Ambedkar to say that he hated Brahmanism and not Brahmins. Brahmanism systematically excluded the lower castes from access to all necessary and desirable resources of life and living. This exclusion was further justified by the Hindu doctrine of ‘karmavaad’ or the notion that the conditions of existence of an individual in the present life are determined on the basis of his ‘karma’ or actions in his previous life. this implied that one would simply have to accept his fate as a result of action performed by him or her in a previous birth and not make any efforts to change nor rebel against his present social, economic and political position. Moreover, folktales, epics and myths were used to systematically entrench this notion of ‘karmavaad’ in the minds of the low castes to the extent that most of them never questioned the extreme atrocities that they had been subjected to till very late in history.

Thirdly, Ambedkar’s insistence on self-help for organizing the outcastes was further important in the sense that (a) it empowered the outcastes or Dalits to look at themselves as being capable of changing their own conditions of existence without help from caste Hindus and (b) the urgent need of the hour was for the Dalits to become politically conscious and organized and that opened the path of all future Elaborate Dalit movements that dominate present-day politics of India significantly.

Fourthly, Ambedkar repeatedly emphasized the fact that he was against Brahmanism and not against Brahmins. He was against the exclusion of large masses of people from access to civil liberties, citizenship rights and equal economic opportunities based on their caste status which in turn was determined by the accident of birth and not on merit or skill of the individual. This struck Ambedkar as singularly unfair and unjust. The system of caste struck at the very basis of the concept of social justice. To enable each individual to have access to equality of treatment and opportunity was thus, one of the basic quests of Ambedkar as a member of the Constituent Assembly that was charged with the task of drafting the Constitution of independent India. This is reflected in the Preamble and the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution, drafted under Ambedkar's stewardship. In order to lead a life imbued with human dignity, it is essential that each man has access to the entire gamut of basic rights as well as be able to earn a respectable livelihood. Ambedkar's speeches and writings, sometimes quite radical in content repeatedly exhorted the untouchables to strive for education, organization and inclusion into the society as equal members of the community.

Fifthly, Ambedkar, with his astute legal faculties realised the importance of legal provisions for creating a political structure for independent India that would enable the Indian state itself to help the outcastes and lower castes to help themselves. Participation in politics was one of the basic presumptions of democratic government. Only a government which allowed all sections of its population to participate in its political processes, without hindrances and handicaps, could truly establish democracy and create conditions for the development of all sections of society. Legal provisions would also be required to ensure that seats in local, state and central governmental structures were reserved for adequate representation and protection of interests of the lower castes of India. Thus, participatory democracy, coupled with positive discrimination in favour of the outcastes and lower castes can finally create such conditions where they can play a positive role in the life of the country.

Sixthly, one often forgets to recognise the immense contribution of Ambedkar to the area of women's rights. A few instances will justify this statement. The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 saw the participation of Dalit women in demanding the rights to temple entry and collection of water from the village water tank. Ambedkar recognized) and appreciated this act on part of the Dalit women and further encouraged their public appearance and participation in social-political movements. On 20 July, 1940, Ambedkar in his address at the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference at Nagpur further reiterated his faith in the autonomy and agency of the Dalit women and how their education could lead to bringing about a change in their lives. As a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, he was the first to table a demand for

granting maternity benefits, including, paid leave to women workers. He had the farsightedness to see that these legislative measures could go a long way in increasing the productivity of women as members of the country's workforce. It is also to be noted that his proposals to the Hindu Code Bill asking for rights of women to inherit ancestral property, adopt children and opt for legal separation from an incompatible marriage were strongly opposed on the floor of the House. He resigned as Law Minister. However, all of these rights later had to be recognized and granted, in response to popular demands and changing times.

Lastly, with reference to Ambedkar's economic ideas and their relevance in the context of globalization, one might reckon that though Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization (LPG) are the ruling ideologies of the present age, yet, there are grave consequences of these global phenomena. Extreme wealth inequalities, political, cultural and ethnic strife, increasing violence, rapid deterioration of global environment due to reckless industrialization have made it necessary to look at Ambedkar's model of state socialism more closely. The need for state ownership of basic and heavy industries and agriculture, state's intervention through public distribution system, discouraging the purely profit-making initiatives in the economic sector are largely called for in the present scenario just as Ambedkar had found them to be crucial for independent India.

20.4 Conclusion

Ambedkar's contribution to the Indian social and political life cannot be confined to his role in organizing, educating and leading the Dalits alone. His deep understanding and interpretation of Indian religions, the way he empowered the masses of excluded and exploited people by making them realize that they could help themselves without relying upon other sources that he has become an inspiration and a symbol of all exploited people in their protests against exploitation and oppression. His legal acumen and his efforts to legally secure the rights of the lower castes and tribes has further added to his contribution towards making India a democracy in a true sense of the term.

20.5 Summing Up

This unit has dealt with Ambedkar's contribution on the following fields:

- He preached self help, education, organization, agitation for the Dalits in order to fight against the atrocities that they had been suffering from.

- He preached ideas that conformed to the notion of social justice that few other contemporary leaders had addressed.
- He sought to provide legal security to the rights of the excluded.
- This unit needs to be elaborated—

Discuss Ambedkar's relevance in terms of (a) understanding the philosophy of the Indian constitution; (b) Human rights and social justice; (c) Women's rights; (d) His economic ideas and their importance in the context of globalization.

20.6 Probable Questions

A. Essay Type Questions :

1. Make a critical analysis of the contemporary relevance of Ambedkar.
2. What were Ambedkar's advise to the untouchables to end the exploitation that they were facing from the caste Hindus?
3. What are Ambedkar's contributions to the Indian Constitution?
4. What do you understand by the notion of 'karmavaad'?

B. Short Questions :

1. How has the Hindu belief in 'Karmavaad' promoted the continuation of caste system in India?
2. What do you understand by the term 'social justice'?

C. Objective Type Questions (MCQS) :

1. "Be your lamp, seek no other refuge but yourself, let Truth be your own light"—Which religious teaching is it?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| (a) Hindu | (b) Buddhist |
| (c) Islamic | (d) Jain |

Ans. (b)

2. Where was All-India Depressed Classes Women's conference held?

Answer Options:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| (a) Nagpur | (b) Bombay |
| (c) Nasik | (d) Pune |

Ans. (a)

3. What is the most important role played by B. R. Ambedkar?

Answer Options:

- (a) Acting as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee
- (b) Acting as a Minister in Nehru cabinet
- (c) Acting as a member of the First Round Table Conference
- (d) None

Ans. (a)

4. Who is the author of the book, “Ambedkar: Towards An Enlightened Life”?

Answer Options:

- (a) G. Omvedt
- (b) C. Jafrelot
- (c) R. Guha
- (d) B. Chandra

Ans. (a)

5. What of the3 following statement is not true?

Answer Options:

- (a) He was opposed to Brahmanism
- (b) He was opposed to ‘Karmaved’
- (c) He was opposed to social injustice
- (d) He was opposed to Brahmins

Ans. (d)

20.7 Further Reading

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10. Ray, B.N. and Misra, R.K. (edited) (2015): *Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi, Kaveri Books.
11. Jaffrelot, C. (2005): *Analysing and Fighting Caste Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*, Delhi, Permanent Black.
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