

Ambedkar's Vision In Question: From Dadri Lynching to Palwal Burning: Existence Endangered (Minorities, Women and Dalits)

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Abstract: B.R. Ambedkar one of the most leading luminaries in the history of India visualised a country which termed as *Prabudha Bharat* or enlightened India. But are we living up to that ideal of enlightened India or are we regressing from what are forefathers fought for and later achieved? Is independent India true in its essence or are we still under the shackles of hackneyed and parochial ideologies which is exploited by our very own rulers ? Aren't we witnessing two Indias where on hand we can boast of several scientific achievements such as the testing of Agni 3, Prithvi and Akash but on the other hand the very same country witnesses barbaric and blood curdling incidents such as women being paraded naked by khap panchayats, two years infant girls being raped by minors, Dalits being refused water and basic sanitation and where Godhras and Dadris still bring shame to our faces. Certainly this is not the India that Ambedkar visualised. Then what did Ambedkar visualise and have we reached that far or do we need many more Ambedkars to make India Prabudh Bharat? This paper seeks to answer these questions through the following points:

- Ambedkar's role as a constitution maker, law maker and a social activist, Brief history of Ambedkar as an untouchable and his journey to become the father of Indian constitution enshrining all the essentials to make Indian constitution one of the most elaborate and detailed body of literature. His role as social activist shall be explored and how he fought for the cause of lower castes, women and also minorities.
- How his ideals stand wounded and shocked in the wake of contemporary atrocities met to the Dalits and the other so-called have-nots such as minorities and women.
- Role of NGOS, political bodies and government in order to redress their grievances. How the guardians and rulers of the country themselves set ablaze the ideals of Indian constitution and exploit them for their own selfish ends.
- How much the Ambedkar's vision is met and what needs to be done in order to realise his dream of enlightened India. A Review will be made what we have achieved in the past fifty years since independence in order to ameliorate the condition of the under privileged.
- Conclusion: summary of all the above points.

B.R. Ambedkar one of the most leading luminaries in the history of India visualised a country which he termed as *Prabudha Bharat* or enlightened India. He often inspired people through a famous saying *Appo Diva Bhava* i.e. Be your Own Light. But are we living up to these ideals of enlightened India or are we regressing from what are forefathers like Ambedkar fought

for and later achieved? Is independent India true in its essence; are we being our own lights or are we still under the shackles of hackneyed and parochial ideologies that form clouds of ignorance which are exploited by our very own rulers who apparently are for us and by us ?

Aren't we witnessing two Indias where on hand we can boast of several scientific achievements such as the testing of Agni 3, Prithvi and Akash but on the other hand the very same country witnesses barbaric and blood curdling incidents such as women being paraded naked by *khap panchayats*, two years infant girls being raped by minors, Dalits being refused water and basic sanitation and an India where Godhras and Dadris still bring shame to our faces. Certainly this is not the India that Ambedkar visualised. Then what did Ambedkar visualise and have we reached that far or do we need many more Ambedkars to make India *Prabudh Bharat*?

The following presentation seeks to answer these questions through three main segments. The first deals with Ambedkar's vision on dalits and an observation is made on how his vision stands challenged and anguished given the contemporary atrocities on dalits. Likewise the second and the third segment deal with Ambedkar's vision on minorities and women. Once again an observation is made on some hard realities that stand in direct juxtaposition to Ambedkar's ambitious visions to make the country truly what many call as Sashakt Bharat.

Being himself a victim of untouchability an *achut* Ambedkar became a vociferous crusader against this social evil and many others that directly or indirectly belittled the under-privileged -be it minorities, be it women or any other category which faced discrimination and exploitation at the hands of those who thought that the world was truly created for them.

Let us now peruse through some of his distinct efforts that he made for the upliftment of the dalits. Besides establishing the *Bhashkrit Hitkarni Sabha*ⁱ intended to promote education and socio-economic improvement, as well as the welfare of "outcastes"; he also started periodicals such as *Mook Nayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, and *Equality Janta*.ⁱⁱ

His other attempts included Satyagrah in Mahadⁱⁱⁱ for untouchables to draw water from the tanks, his burning of the *Manusmriti*^{iv} that justified the caste system and his signing of the Poona Pact that gave reservation to the Dalits in provisional legislatures^v. Lastly as the country's

first lawmaker he also accomplished his fight for reservation of jobs for the SC's, ST's and OBC's in civil services, government schools and colleges.^{vi}

Despite all these efforts let us see where do we stand today after so many years of independence. Let us begin with untouchability. A legal ban against caste discrimination and untouchability was introduced in British India under the Caste Disabilities Removal Act XXI of 1850.^{vii}

Now let us look where have these efforts taken Dalits today. According to one recent study, untouchability is practiced in 80 per cent of Indian villages. Crimes against SCs – ranging from humiliating verbal abuses to rape and murder – are also widespread. There were 203,576 registered cases of crimes committed against SCs by non-SCs in India between 2003 and 2009.^{viii}

At the same time, UP has witnessed an increase in the incidence of crimes against Dalits. But before I dwell on those details, I wish to draw attention to the recent case in Palwal where a house of a Dalit was burnt which had his two little children. This incident and the one in Hyderabad again where a Dalit student was instigated to commit suicide and many others that I wish to quote can be attributed to the growing freedom and assertion, of the Dalits, their relative improvement in the educational and economic status that the Dalits achieved which are provoking a backlash.

Similarly discriminatory instances against the Dalits can be enumerated as follows. Dalit students in a few states are given scholarships only after they produce photographs of family members working in traditional occupations. Similarly a crime against Dalits happens every 18 minutes — 3 women raped every day, 13 murdered every week, 27 atrocities every day, 6 kidnapped every week.^{ix}

There have been reports of Dalits being forced to eat human faeces and drink urine by Christian Thevars.^x In September 2015, a 45-year-old dalit woman was stripped naked and was forced to drink urine by perpetrators belonging from the Yadav community in M.P.^{xi}

In several incidents if dalits found burning holika for Holika Dahan ceremony, they are tonsured and paraded naked in the villages.^{xii} Also in some parts of India, Dalit grooms riding horses for wedding ceremonies are often beaten up and ostracised by upper caste people.

In his work *States and Minorities* – Ambedkar’s ideal constitution – was the passion to ensure justice for minorities. Ambedkar was never a believer in a parliamentary democracy based on first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. He did not believe that mere ‘proportionate representation of minorities’ in an elected body would ensure them justice. He was of the view that minorities – Muslims, Dalits, Anglo-Indians or Sikhs in the Indian context – ought to have greater representation in a legislative body than their actual share in the population if the minority were not to be ‘crushed and overwhelmed by the communal majority.’^{xiii}

Again let us see how much are minorities safe in post- independent India or do they still have to bear the brunt of being the underdogs. A few instances bring light to this section. Religious violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims during September–October 1969, in Gujarat. The rioting started after an attack on a Hindu temple in Ahmedabad. Some 660 people were killed (430 Muslims, rest Hindus), 1074 people were injured and over 48,000 lost their property.^{xiv}

Similarly in June 1984, under orders from Indira Gandhi, the Indian army attacked the Golden temple with tanks and armoured vehicles to uproot Bhinderwale who was demanding separate statehood for Punjab. In this operation known as Operation Blue Star thousands of Sikhs died during the attack. In retaliation for the storming of the Golden temple, Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984 by two Sikh bodyguards.

The assassination provoked mass rioting against Sikhs in Delhi. As a result of the pogroms 10,000–17,000 were burned alive or otherwise killed, Sikh people suffered massive property damage, and at least 50,000 Sikhs were displaced.^{xv}

Likewise, in yet another case on 6 December 1992, members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal destroyed the 430-year-old Babri Mosque in Ayodhya and it was claimed by the Hindus that the mosque was built over the birthplace of the ancient deity Rama. This action allegedly caused humiliation to the Muslim community. The resulting religious riots caused at least 1200 deaths in the city of Bombay. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalists on 6 December 1992, riots took place between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Mumbai.^{xvi}

Similarly, many of Ahmedabad's buildings were set on fire during 2002 Gujarat violence. The Godhra train burning incident in which Hindus were burned alive allegedly by

Muslims by closing door of train, led to the 2002 Gujarat riots in which mostly Muslims were killed in an act of retaliation. According to the Congressional Research Service, up to 2000 people were killed in the violence.^{xvii}

In Orissa, starting December 2007, Christians have been attacked in Kandhamal and other districts, resulting in the deaths of two Hindus and one Christian, and the destruction of houses and churches. An Australian missionary, was burnt to death while he was sleeping in his station wagon at Manoharpur.

A recent incident that adds to this whole repertoire of communal violence is the Dadri lynching case where a muslim Akhlaq was killed by the Hindus for keeping beef in his house.

The above facts enlightened us on the status of minorities and the Dalits in present day India that boasts of the loftiest constitution and being the largest democracy. A yet another category that stands in dire straits of on and on is that of women once again who are as the title of my paper calls them endangered.

The last segment of my presentation concerns Ambedkar's vision on women. I quote *"I am a great believer in women's organization I know that what they can do to improve the condition of the society if they are convinced. They should educate their children and instil high ambition in them."* These are the words of Ambedkar at the All India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held at Nagpur on 20th July, 1940 where Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that there could not be any progress without women.^{xviii}

Let us now turn our attention to some of the glum realities that mock at the very existence of women who have been considered venerable life givers in Indian tradition but in today's world very few live a respectable life instead majority live a life which is petrified, scared and self demeaning because of nothing but male hegemony which is abusive, tormenting and in a few cases barbaric.

One of the forms of torture to women include Honor Killings. Honor killings are a common form of violence against women in certain parts of the world. In honor killings, women and girls are killed by family members for saving the social respect of the family. Honor killings are especially seen in Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.^{xix} Ironically enough those who actuate such things are

not dishonouring women and some members of our civil society honour them for such gruesome acts.

Other forms of cruelties against women In India, are rape, acid throwing, domestic violence, female foeticide and infanticide among others. In India a woman is raped every 29 minutes.^{xx}Incidents of reported rape increased 3% from 2011 to 2012. Incidents of reported incest rape increased 46.8% from 268 cases in 2011 to 392 cases in 2012. The most recent incident of rape was the gang rape of a 22 year old lady in a moving bus known as the Nirbhaya Gang rape case.

Similarly domestic violence too adds to the repertoire of crimes against women. In India, despite the presence of stringent acts such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 70% of women are victims of domestic violence. 38% of Indian men admit they have physically abused their partner.^{xxi}

Similarly acid attacks constitute another dimension of atrocities on women. At least 72% of reported acid attacks in India have involved women.^{xxii} India has been experiencing an increasing trend of acid attacks over the past decade. Reasons for such acts again point the needle towards our flimsy legal provisions, and lack of adequate protection for women folk.

Apart from these three categories that I have been able to comment upon there are several other issues that put a big question mark on the vision of our forefathers be it the North East problem, be it the Kashmir crisis, terrorism, corruption present status of Indian parliament- all of which leave us dismayed, disillusioned and in despair.

Thus, to conclude I wish to say that overall Ambedkar's vision remains in doldrums especially because our very own administrators; who should be carrying the luminous baton handed to them by true sons of the soil; burn Ambedkar's vision, leave it unrealised and go all out to make sure that not only Ambedkar but all other great visionaries of the nation see their ideals lie wounded, shocked and fighting to breath.

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