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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: An inspiration to youth

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Abstract

His five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station, my mind was considerably disturbed by a question, "Where to go? Who will take me?" I felt deeply agitated. Hindu hotels would not take me. The only way of seeking accommodation therein was by impersonation. But I was not prepared for it, because I could well anticipate the dire consequences which were sure to follow if my identity was discovered—as it was sure to be." The other's experiences are covered in the memoir's last two chapters in his biography: 'A doctor refuses to give proper care, and a young woman dies' and 'A young clerk is abused and threatened until he gives up his job'.

Keywords: Untouchability, impersonation, oppression, Mahar, Koregoan

Introduction

No one has choice of their birth. But after born somewhere and learn something we should develop our own. According to Baba Saheb Ambedkar our destiny decides by not our society or anything except our attitude and hard work.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar born on 14th April 1891 into a Mahar caste who were treated as untouchables. He was one of the 14 children of his parents. Though he born in depressed class, in spite of all his oppression, he made himself.

The life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is a saga of a great struggle of a man who in spite of his being born in a family of 'untouchables', rose to great heights and occupied important positions entirely on account of his great Merit, Planning, Determination and Hard work what everyone should learn from his life.

At the age of six, Ambedkar lost his mother. Ambedkar and his elder brother started their schooling at Satara. At school, they suffered untold humiliations due to the stigma attached to their caste. They would be made to sit outside of the classroom. When thirsty, they could not just go to tap quench their thirst like other children because they were not allowed to touch the tap. When thirsty, school peon would pour water into their upturned mouths from atop, making sure that the water pot would not touch their unholy bodies. Nobody else in the school would perform even this mundane act for the boys. Later, Ambedkar described the agony of those days in his essay "No Peon, No water". Once when Ambedkar was found steal the drinking water from a public tap, he was roughly thrashed.

In 1901, Ambedkar and his brother have to travel by train up to Masur from where Koregoan was 10 miles away. When the train reached Masur, they found that their father had not come to pick them up. They decided to hire a cart for reaching Koregoan but when the cart owners realized they were Mahars, they refused to give them a ride. At last, with the intervention of Station Master, one Cart owner agreed to lend his cart on the condition that they will have to pay double the fare and also drive the cart by themselves. Cart owner will walk behind the cart. Left with no choice, they agreed to the terms. On the way, when they wanted to partake food, brought from home for the journey, no one was ready to give them water. Ambedkar knew that he was untouchable and had to follow a certain code of conduct but never before he had to face such inhuman treatment and humiliations. It made him think about Untouchability.

A few days passed. One day Bhim felt unbearable thirst. He drank water from a well. Someone noticed it. A few people gathered and beat the boy mercilessly.

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Ambedkar writes in his biography, "Waiting for a Visa": "This incident has a very important place in my life. I was a boy of nine when it happened. But it has left an indelible impression on my mind."

In his biography, he describes his days in Baroda city, where he had just returned from the West after completing his education and was unable to find a place to stay. Ambedkar writes: "My five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station, my mind was considerably disturbed by a question, "Where to go? Who will take me?" I felt deeply agitated. Hindu hotels would not take me. The only way of seeking accommodation therein was by impersonation. But I was not prepared for it, because I could well anticipate the dire consequences which were sure to follow if my identity was discovered—as it was sure to be."

In his biography, the third segment titled 'Pride, awkwardness, and a dangerous accident in Chalisgaon' Ambedkar writes about an incident that dates back to 1929. The Bombay government had formed a committee to investigate the grievances of the untouchables. Ambedkar was appointed a member of this committee, which was tasked with travelling all over the province to probe cases of injustices. At the Chalisgaon station, Ambedkar would later learn, the tongawallahs had refused to ferry "the untouchables", which meant someone who didn't know how to drive the Tonga was tasked with the job. "(The horse, instead of going straight, took a turn and bolted. The wheel of the Tonga struck against the side stone so forcibly that I was bodily lifted up and thrown down on the stone pavement of the culvert, and the horse and the carriage fell down from the culvert into the river... As a result of this I received several injuries. My leg was fractured, and I was disabled for several days.)"

The other's experiences are covered in the memoir's last two chapters in his biography: 'A doctor refuses to give proper care, and a young woman dies' and 'A young clerk is abused and threatened until he gives up his job'.

One day It was afternoon. Two boys were thirsty. They begged for water but no one would give them a drop. Hours passed. Still, no one gave them water. They were not allowed even to go near tanks and wells. The boy's name was Bhimrao Ambedkar. A few days passed. One day Bhimrao felt unbearable thirst. He drank water from a well. Someone noticed it. A few people gathered and beat the boy mercilessly.

On another day, he going to school. It was raining heavily. He took shelter near the wall of a house. The lady of the house saw this. She was very angry. She pushed him into the rain. He fell into the muddy water. All his books fell into the water too. His mind became a volcano of bitter feelings.

In the high school he received a wound he could never forget in his life. It was Bhim's desire to learn Sanskrit. Other Hindus of the School could learn Sanskrit. But it was ordered that he should not learn Sanskrit because he belonged to the Mahar cast! People born in other countries, people not Hindus at all were allowed to read the Vedas. No one objected. This injustice made him all the more bitter.

In June 1913 with the help of Maharaja of Baroda he went to USA for higher studies. That time North America which was a colony of British in the late 18th century waged a historic struggle for independence under the leadership of

great men like *George Washington*. The subsequent battle for abolition of the slavery of the American Negroes in which men of vision like *Abraham Lincoln* was a great event in world history. The world had not come out of the spell caste by people like, *George Washington*, *Thomas Jefferson*, *Abraham Lincoln*, and the great negro leader *Booker. T. Washington*.

Determined to make the best possible use of the unique opportunity which circumstances had thrown his way; Ambedkar applied himself with a single-minded devotion to his studies. He did not waste his time in indulging in recreational activities which were normal for other students of his age. Moreover, he had the responsibility to send a part of his stipend to maintain his family. To do this, he cut down even on his food. He studied for as many as 18 hours a day. During his higher studies Dr. Ambedkar spent long days on empty stomach.

In 1915 he awarded M.A degree for his thesis entitled "Ancient Indian commerce". Apart from this, he presented a paper entitled "Castes in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" in a seminar on Anthropology in May 1916 in which he not only traced the origin of the caste system in India brilliantly but also pointed out its evil consequences.

In June 1916, he submitted his thesis for the Ph.D. degree to the Columbia University which was entitled "The National Dividend of India, a Historic and Analytical Study". Later on, this thesis was enlarged and published as "The Evolution of Imperial Provincial Finance in India". The entire book was highly critical of the British bureaucracy and of the British imperial system and brought out forcefully Ambedkar's love and concern of his country. (within three years 1913-1916 he completed his M.A and Ph.D.). Many know Dr. Ambedkar to have written several volumes of works. The lesser known fact is that he was also a lexicographer and compiled a Pali/English dictionary.

Back in India in 1918, he was appointed as a probationer in the accountant general's office by the king. After only 11 days, he was made to leave Baroda because he was constantly being humiliated by peons and other workers there. The floors of his office, which his colleagues believed had been rendered impure in the presence of an untouchable, were cleaned every day after he left. The files he touched were not touched by others. The office assistants never listened to him. If work was humiliating, home was a nightmare. The above excerpt was written by Ambedkar recalling the terror he felt in a Parsi inn where he was staying in Baroda. Ambedkar posed as a Parsi as he knew he would not be given a place to stay in other hotels. Eventually, he was caught in his lie and was thrown out by goons. He was never treated as a man should be but "was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility".

Later, after successful completion of studies at the Columbia University he left New York in 1916 for London and entered in October 1916 the Gray's Institution for doing his Bar-at-Law, and also simultaneously enrolled himself in the famous London School of Economics.

He left the job in Baroda and went to Bombay and he joined as a Professor of Economics in a Government college on a temporary basis to get the money to complete his unfinished studies in London. To save money he lived very simple life, his family stayed in a two-room compartment. After pooled sufficient money he leaves for London in July 1920. He

pursued his studies in economics at the London school of Economics and was called to bar simultaneously.

In addition, he spent long hours at the famous London Museum Library. He stayed as a paying guest. Due to financial reasons he used to have only breakfast and dinner. He was too poor to eat outside. His total monthly expenses did not exceed 8 pounds (Rs. 101 in Indian currency). He walked long distances because he could not afford to pay for train fare or hire other modes of conveyance. He completed his studies successfully. Despite western education (England, America and Germany) and its influence, he had deep roots in Indian soil and spent the rest of his life in identifying the problems of his mother land and in finding out ways to solve them. He never forgets his mother land.

After starting his practice as a barrister in India, the litigants belonging to the upper castes were not willing to hire even such a highly qualified barrister. Ambedkar was naturally depressed by these conditions but his spirit was as usual undaunted and his determination and enthusiasm unabated.

Another difficulty faced by Ambedkar was the fact that the solicitors who were mostly Upper caste Hindu, did not wish to have any business dealings with an untouchable. Ambedkar, therefore, had a difficult situation even in a profession for which he was so eminently qualified. In the beginning he had to be content with small cases in the subordinate courts, and wait patiently for the day when he would be able to appear with full dignity in High Court. Under this difficult and trying situation, he did not lose courage. He was extremely confident that some day he would definitely succeed and make a mark in his chosen profession. He was not a person to be cowed down by such an adverse circumstance.

Dr. Ambedkar once said, "Owing to poverty, I used to attend the school with nothing more than a loin cloth on my body. I could not get water to drink in the school. When thirsty, I was not allowed to touch the tap myself. Untouchability was observed even in Elphinstone College, Bombay".

He could not offer Sanskrit, because he was untouchable. However, he became a great Sanskrit scholar because of strong determination, hard work and industry. He often said that, "given the opportunities we are inferior to none". Who denied to sit in the class, his portrait is in every school and his life history is in the hands of every student as well as teacher as a text book because of his Planning, Determination and Hard work only.

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