

The Praxis of Ambedkarism Today: Limbale's *Hindu*

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Abstract

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar stands foremost among the thinkers who not just visualized a just society where everyone could live with human dignity, but also taught the exploited and the downtrodden people to fight for their rights in an organized way. It is because of the depth of comprehending the roots of Indian social problems and the visionary zeal to eradicate them systematically to ensure a peaceful co-existence of varied sects of people in Indian society that Babasaheb's ideas find their utmost relevance even till day. The champion of the underdogs and the Messiah of the oppressed, his ideals and propositions if practiced in their letter and spirit, have the promise to usher in an era of contentment and fraternity in India. But the present politics has hit an all time low, dividing the people by creating artificial barriers among them for the personal benefits of a few. The dalits themselves have become victims of the divisive politics that is preventing them from achieving the ideals set by Dr. Ambedkar. That Ambedkarism itself is being manipulated by a few mischief mongers for their own vested interests is the order of the day. It is in this context that Sharan kumar Limbale's *Hindu: A Novel* presents a realistic analysis of the contemporary power politics. The hiatus between the ideals of Dr. Ambedkar cherished by the Dalits and their inability to realize them productively and the underlying power politics is pivotal to the novel. In this paper the praxis of Ambedkarism and the varied obstacles preventing the achievement of social goals of equality and justice that are presented in the novel *Hindu* are examined so as to work towards mitigating them and usher in the dream of Dr. Ambedkar of a truly republic India.

Keywords: Ambedkarism, fraternity, praxis, social goals

Introduction

"I curse you... Curse your culture, your hypocrisy."

---Namdeo Dhasal

The recent clash between the Thakurs and the Dalits in the Saharanpur caste-conflict in Uttar Pradesh is yet another incident among the countless violent outbursts that have upset the social equilibrium in the post-independent India. It is said that the incident was triggered off when the Rajputs prevented the Dalits from installing a statue of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on the premises of the Ravidas temple at Shabbirpur village. Only a few days later, the Dalits raised objections to a procession of Rajputs who were bent upon commemorating the birth anniversary of Maharana Pratap resulting in large-scale destruction and bloodshed. This is just one example

of such caste-wars that have been ever on the rise in India in the contemporary times. And this contemporary incident finds an echo in the novel *Hindu*, where in Milind Kamble, the narrator's idea of merging Shivashakti and Bhimashakti receives a rather lukewarm response. His proposal of celebrating the jayantis of Babasaheb and Shivaji maharaj together is protested by other dalits. They say- "*There is absolutely no need for celebrating Shivajayanti and Bhimajayanti together. We always put up the portrait of Shivaji Maharaj, but they never put up Babasaheb's photo. Then why should we bother? If the invocation to join forces is motivated by fear, it would just drag us into long term violent unrest.*" (p. 2-3). It is this kind of an undercurrent of hostility that needs to be addressed and plugged for the healthy coexistence in the society. But with all the political parties busy and calculative on the numbers for gaining power, people are reified as their vote-bank and the hostility is deliberately kept alive so as to derive their sustenance. A new awareness of the socio-political implications of such motivated violent acts need to be created in the present context. It is here that novels like *Hindu* can throw light on the intricacies of the caste politics that are strumpeted for the vested interests of a few miscreants.

Dr. Sharan Kumar Limbale is aware that untouchability and caste discrimination are taking new shapes in modern India, and regrets that "*In the past, one upper-caste person would beat up one Dalit; but now the entire upper-caste community boycotts the entire Dalit community in the village,*" and points out, "*Now the caste violence is collective; it is also political as well as social.*" He further exemplifies that Dalits have now got powerful 'chairs,' but no power to go with them. "*Dalit IAS officers, professors or even Ministers are just second-class people in their respective professions,*" he adds. His novel *The Hindu* orchestrates these current realities in all its malicious details glaring at us and therefore can be read as a socio-cultural documentary of the contemporary caste politics. The Dalit movement with its strong roots in the ideals of social justice and equality of Dr. Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule appears routed differently in the present political situations. So this paper examines the failure of the praxis of Ambedkarism as brought out in the novel *Hindu*. The appropriation of Ambedkarism by different political factions for fulfilling their personal vendetta and the vicious nexus between malevolent entities which have vilified the social fabric of India, leaving the vision of Dalit and women emancipation blurred, as brought out in the novel is analysed.

Ambedkarism: The ideals and action

Ambedkarism if attempted to be explained in a nutshell can be said to be a body of ideas that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It is an organized struggle for justice against all the odds and social discriminations that are being faced by historically excluded communities. However, in a more perceptive way, Dr Gail Omvedt in his essay 'Ambedkarism': The Theory of Dalit Liberation – I, acknowledges that 'Ambedkarism' is today a living force in India, much as Marxism is: it defines the ideology of the Dalit movement and, to a large extent, an even broader anti-caste movement". He further adds that – "Yet, just as 'Marxism' as a trend in the working class movement has to be distinguished from the actual theorizing of Karl Marx, so the urge to abolish the social and economic exploitation involved in caste and capitalism (which is the main significance of 'Ambedkarism' as a general

movement ideology) must be distinguished from the complex grappling of an individual activist-theoretician with the interpretation of Indian reality.”

Dr. Omvedt points that Ambedkar’s thought was not always consistent and it did not (and the same of course can be said for Marx) fully resolve the problems he grappled with. But some themes stand out:

First, an uncompromising dedication to the needs of his people, the Dalits which required the total annihilation of the caste system and the Brahmanic superiority it embodied.

Second an almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India-- but an India whose historical—cultural interpretation he sought to wrest from the imposition of a ‘Hindu’ identity to understand it in its massive, popular reality.

Third a conviction that the eradication of caste required a repudiation of ‘Hinduism’ as a religion, and adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism, a choice which he saw as not only necessary for the masses of Dalits who followed him but for the masses in India generally.

Fourth, a broad economic radicalism interpreted as ‘socialism’ (state socialism’ in some versions; ‘democratic socialism’ in others) mixed with and growing out of his democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights.

Fifth, a fierce rationalism which burned through his attacks on Hindu superstitions to interpret even the Buddhism he came to in rationalistic, ‘liberation theology’ forms.

And finally, a political orientation which linked a firmly autonomous Dalit movement with a constantly attempted alliance of the socially and economically exploited (Dalits and Shudras, ‘workers’ and ‘peasants’ in class terms) projected as an alternative political front to the congress party he saw as the unique platform of ‘Brahminism’ and ‘Capitalism’.

When the events in the novel are seen in this backdrop of how Ambedkar visualized for the upliftment of the dalits, it is easily decipherable that the events after the murder of Tatya Kamble a staunch Ambedkarite, almost go out of sync with the highest values of Dr. Ambedkar. In fact, Tatya Kamble death is a metaphorical death of Ambedkarism itself.

Tatya Kamble: Ambedkarism in action

Tatya Kamble though appears in the novel only for a short duration, with his murder being the lead incident precipitating the other events that follow in the novel, he emerges as the pivotal person becoming the touchstone of all other motives that are at work in the novel. His absent presence like the spirit of Dr. Ambedkar pervades throughout the span of the novel, acting as a counter reference point with which all the turns in the novel can be measured. In fact Tatya Kamble, the dalit activist of Achalpur is murdered by the higher caste villagers, as Arun Prabha Mukherjee in the introduction to the novel states, “because he had become too big for his boots in their eyes and through his Ambedkarite theatre was threatening the established order by inciting his caste members, Mahars to convert.” It is significant to note that Tatya Kamble is murdered on 14th October, the day on which Dr. Ambedkar in 1956, had left the folds of Hinduism and embraced Buddhism. The murder of Tatya Kamble brings the whole conversion ceremony to an abrupt halt and leaves the village under the chaotic condition of mass destruction. The novel opens with the theme of conversion where the narrator Milind Kamble, a

friend of Tatyka Kamble, is participating in the Ambedkar jalsa. He is charged with the fiery speeches against the exclusionist practices of the Hindu religious followers but also experiencing physical temptation on hearing the female voice Rama Babar, indicating the lack of commitment and integrity in the present generation of dalits. Milind Kamble ponders over her physical attributes and about the politics of the times with the same callousness showing the lack of direction and the shallowness that has engulfed the minds of easy-going youngsters, who are Ambedkarites only for name sake. Pandit Kanade's words – "*People have denigrated all right. Every leader has misused Babasaheb's name to deceive society. Our politics is like a hijira's wife*" (P. 5) set the tone and tenor of the praxis of Ambedkarism in the contemporary situation. The superficial adherence to Babasaheb's principles cannot be more ironically presented than in the Buddhist converts still worshipping the Hindu Gods and Goddesses though secretly. Milind confesses- "*While our drawing room sports portrait of Babasaheb and Buddha, the kitchen belongs to the Hindu gods and goddesses*" (p.6)

In fact the hypocrisy of Milind's existence comes full circle when he witnesses the cold blooded murder of Tatyka Kamble, the living spirit of Ambedkar yet fails to disclose it to the police and bring the murders to justice. He is almost an indirect participant in killing the ideals of Babasaheb when he is lolling over women and wine when the entire maharwada is burning and men like Manikchand and Gopichand are taking advantage of the chaos that ensues, raping the helpless dalit woman who had ungainly taken shelter in the bushes. Here Milind Kamble in all his shallowness becomes an embodiment of all those selfish qualities that hideously have killed the spirit of Ambedkar's thoughts and principles.

The Appropriation of Ambedkarism

The novel graphically portrays the dalits role in their self-inflicted enslavement. With the awareness of equal rights brought about by the efforts of Babasaheb, the dalits have learnt to stand up for their self-respect and turn to political participation. But using the rules of reservation of seats in politics and knowing fully well that the post of the village sarpanch falls to the share of a dalit, the naïve Sadananda Kamble, the younger brother of the murdered Tatyka Kamble is successfully fielded by his upper caste employers, Manikchand and Gopichand, after confirming his permanent loyalties to them. What happens to caste relations, the new political consensus that emerges slowly, if violently, are delineated perceptively. The text also now switches from the first person narrative of a dalit, Milind Kamble to the corrupt and dissolute upper caste twins, Gopichand and Manikchand, who successfully make politics a successful business investment by exploiting the chaotic situation. In fact the notorious twins strategically plan and squeeze out money from Madhukar Kavale, the murderer Prabhakar Kavale's brother encashing his fear of his failure to get his brother out of the jail. As Sadananda Kamble, the murdered Tatyka's younger brother works as the watch man at the house of the twins, they have an edge over controlling the passions of Sadananda Kamble, which they use as a bait to extort money from Madhukar Kavale. The meeting between them at Hotel Pratham-

Madhukar- "*You can persuade Sadanand. He will listen to you*"

They- *“We don’t want to get involved in this. If you tell us to fire Sadananda, we will do it. We don’t want any hassles”.*

Madhukar- *“No, Firing Sadanand will only make matters worse. Let him stay in your employment. In that case the other parties won’t be able to lure him. You just work on him”*

They- *“This matter is not going to be fixed just by talking to Sadanand. There is a whole community, a whole movement behind him....”* (P. 63)

Again, *“.....If you are prepared to spend money then name your figure”*

Madhukar- *“Rs.1 lakh. He will have to say what our lawyer asks him to”*

They- *“A Mahar’s life is not worth a lakh. You don’t have to spend so much. But it is a matter of life and death of eight persons. Many proofs will have to be destroyed to get them acquitted. Witnesses will have to be bought. Certain dalit leaders’ pockets will have to be lined. Please remember that all the vultures are watching Taty Kamble’s corpse intently. We could meet provided you are ready to spend Rs. 10 lakhs.....”*

When Madhukar says it is a very huge sum, they frighten him by falsely telling him- *“.....Sadanand had left for your bara with axe in hand, and would have butchered everybody in the bara, had we not stopped him.”* (P.64)

When finally Madhukar gives them 1 lakh for managing Sadanand, it can be seen from a third person narrator that- *“Manikchand and Gopichand’s pleasure in Taty Kamble’s murder was multiplied many times over today”* showing the text alternating between the two, playing up a dual perspective vividly showing the contradictions within individuals. The above conversation ironically shows how the murder of Taty Kamble instead of awakening the sentiments of dalits to fight for justice is now only a ploy to make money by many people irrespective of caste and ideological differences.

The events that follow only show how the entire populace of Achalpur now is hoodwinked by the malicious twins by manipulating the dalit leaders, the press, Savita kamble, Taty’s wife, his son Rohit and Sadananda Kamble in a methodical way. All of them easily fall prey because of their own inherent personal interests. The very commandments of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to *“educate, agitate and organize”* are ironically being used by Manikchand and Gopichand by conducting staged protests dramatically to achieve results that are advantageous for their further extortion of money and power, thus completely appropriating the essence of Ambedkarism for their ill intentioned purposes. The failure of the real Ambedkarites to perceive this and plug it on time, the apathy on the part of dalits like Milind Kamble and the disunity between dalits like Professor Banasode and Nikam Mama eventually result in the failure of the movement. The conversation between the dalit leaders and the twins at Hotel Delhi Darbar arranged by Manikchand reflects this strategic appropriation-

Gopichand- *“Get the Achalpur dalits to march. I take the responsibility to bring them out”*

Professor Bansode- *“If you take the responsibility of bringing Acalpur Dalits, a demonstration outside the collectorate could be organized”*

Gopichand- *“Tomorrow ten truckloads of people will come, at two in the afternoon. I take the responsibility to arrange that”*. (p. 73)

After the twins leave, the conversation between the dalits leaders makes the appropriation obvious-

Rama Babar- *“These twins aren’t simpletons. They are talking about bringing ten truckloads of people, but how could they all be dalits? It is not right to have hired people take part in the demonstration. They must have an axe to grind, I feel. Besides, why would they spend so much money? They are not being open about their intentions. I think they want to use us”*

She also very rightly points out that *“The movement should run on its own strength”*

Upon persuasion by Professor Bansode that they have to have the movement for Taty Kamble’s sake, Rama again points out that *“Taty Kamble would have protested against such a plan”* (P. 74)

Finally they agree to the proposition of Manikchand only because if they don’t then Nikam Mama will accept it, revealing that the fractured unity among dalits will lead to their exploitation. The derailing of Ambedkarism once started continues till its complete exhaustion at the end of the novel. Professor Bansode now relies on the twins for organizing the movement. Gopichand after accepting the request for help from Bansode comments- *“He will probably ask for help with organizing. He will take fifty rupees and spend five. The movement is nothing but a racket now”*. (p. 93). Thus contrary to what Dr. Ambedkar had propagated, the entire Acalpur gets divided into two factions because of the politics played by miscreants like Manikchand and Gopichand. Acalpur now had a Bhimshakti, a Bhimnagar and Hutatma Taty Kamble Path and also Shivashakti, Kailashvasi Jagganath Pandit Marg. The twins supported Sadanand Kamble not just won the elections but he also became the Sarpanch of Acalpur as it was reserved seat. But he was a token representative and the deputy sarpanch Narendra Patil took over the reins of power. The village does not allow the dalit sarpanch to unfurl the National flag and even manhandles him over the issue. But Sadananda Kamble sells his soul to the twins and with their support he forsakes the dalit cause. When Chandrakant alleges him- *“You have betrayed the movement”* Sadanand Kamble responds – *“The movement did not give me a ticket to fight the elections with. I am not indebted to the movement.”* (P.111) which completes the appropriation of Babasaheb’s ideals.

The Status Quo?

It is only when Sadanand Kamble wins the elections with support and the money funded by Gopichand and Manikchand and becomes the minister that the whole edifice of Babasaheb’s struggle for equality of Dalits is shaken. The following lines in the novel are symbolic of the defeat of Ambedkarism-

“Many people of Achalpur were planning to go to the oath-taking ceremony. Bhimnagar, however, was quiet.

Once again, people were reminded of the terrifying stillness that had settled on Bhimnagar after Taty Kamble’s murder” (P.130)

Although it was a dalit of their own village who had rose to the position of a minister, the dalits knew that he will not represent *their* specific issues and problems as he has been bought by the unscrupulous twins. Prof. Banasode very rightly remarks- *“He is a simple watchman, what does he know about governance? If people like him get elected as dalit representatives, it will not only harm dalits but also the nation’s democratic structure.....It is unjust to give savarnas the power to decide the dalit’s future. Before people elect their representative, they ought to investigate his intellectual and psychological makeup”*. When Rama Babar says that people’s choice has to be respected in Democracy, Yakub Sheikh adds that –*“This is not the people’s verdict, but Manu’s. One would have to wag one’s tail to get their votes”*(p.131) which highlights the maintenance of status quo despite all efforts to change the equations that have prevailed from the time of Manu.

The fact that Sadananda Kamble for the sake of savarna sympathy and votes fails to testify the murder of Taty Kamble disappoints the dalits of Bhimnagar who do not participate in welcoming his ministerial visit to their village. The events that follow indicate the complete failure of the Movement, for which so many Ambedkarites had given their life blood. The caste hatred is intensified by people like the twins and Milind Kamble who thrive in strife and disturbance. The simmering anger and frustration of the dalits is further aggravated by the unfortunate event of naked parading of the dalit woman Draupadi, reaching its pinnacle in the acquittal of all the murderers of Taty Kamble. Finally, Kabir Kamble takes it on himself to punish the main culprit Prabhakar Kamble and kills him during his grand reception at his house. So, the novel comes full circle when the events that had set of with the murder of a dalit ends with the cold blooded murder of a savarna. Eye for an eye thrives even after all the excise of jurisprudence!

Conclusion

The ultimate failure of the praxis of Babasaheb’s ideals is brought about the spineless hypocrites like Milind Kamble, Pandit Kanade, and the selfish activists Professor Bansode and others who wanted to fulfil their own interests using the Movement. The words of Prof. Banasode echo the contemporary reality- *“A movement does not run on the strength of people with fickle loyalties. A movement goes forward only on the shoulders of people who have stamina and faith.”* (p. 132). The novel ends with the symbolic metamorphosis of Milind Kamble who loses his manhood and virility to become an impotent neuter. The last lines of Laxmi, Milind’s wife to him –*“You have sold yourself and now want to sell Babasaheb as well”* (p. 155) is a fitting warning to all those who although cherish the ideals of equality and human dignity, fail to act in a relevant and ethical way. And self-reliant, confident and politically organized Dalits who

refuse to be co-opted in the project of other political bodies and who are politically schooled in the vision and dream of Babasaheb Ambedkar for a casteless society devoid of feudal upper caste dominance can only bring in the necessary changes for an egalitarian and happy society.

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