

Dr Ambedkar's Family Life: A Tragic Tale

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Abstract

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a jurist, economist, social reformer, a political leader, a legendary personality, the greatest Indian and the creator of the Indian Constitution was born in a Mahar community. He was the person who was responsible for creating law against untouchability. He devoted and dedicated his life for obtaining prestigious status of the Dalits. His contribution towards the making of constitution is unquestionable, and even he has made a permanent mark in almost every field he had touched upon. The whole Dalit community and the members of the scheduled castes and tribes will be obliged to him for his contribution. As the member of the Dalit community, he has to face a lot of hardships and segregation all over, but he could survive and outlasted just because of his studios and hardworking capacity. But this great personality was not able to get enough love and respect from his family nor he could provide the essential care and comfort to his family. His family life was nothing less than a tragedy. The present research paper focuses on the family background and his personal life that has put a full stop to his great work just because of his financial condition and his poor health resulted due to overwork.

Key Words: untouchability, cantonment, casteism, constitution, segregation, discrimination, circumstances, neuropathic, homeopathic.

Early Life and Education:

Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in the town and military cantonment of Mhow which is now officially known as Dr Ambedkar Nagar in Madhya Pradesh. He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal, an army officer who held the rank of Subedar, and Bhimabai Sakpal, daughter of Laxman Murbadkar. His family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambadawe in Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra. Ambedkar was born into a Mahar (Dalit) caste, who were treated as untouchables and subjected to socio-economic discrimination. Ambedkar's ancestors had long worked for the army of the British East India Company, and his father served in the British Indian Army at the Mhow cantonment. Although they attended school, Ambedkar and other untouchable children were segregated and given little attention or help by teachers. They were not allowed to sit inside the class nor they were allowed to drink water along with other students of the higher castes. Thus, his childhood was full of agony caused due to casteism and cruel treatment at the hands of the higher castes.

In 1897, Ambedkar's family moved to Mumbai where Ambedkar became the only untouchable enrolled at Elphinstone High School. In 1906, when he was about 15 years old, he married a nine-year-old girl, Ramabai. The match was arranged by the couple's parents, in accordance with prevailing custom at that time.

In 1907, he passed his matriculation examination and in the following year he entered Elphinstone College, which was affiliated to the University of Bombay, becoming, according to him, the first from his Mahar caste to do so. When he passed his English fourth standard examinations, the people of his community wanted to celebrate because they considered that he had reached "great heights" which he says was "hardly an occasion compared to the state of education in other communities". A public ceremony was evoked, to celebrate his success, by the community, and it was at this occasion that he was presented with a biography of the Buddha by Dada Keluskar, the author and a family friend. By 1912, he obtained his degree in Economics and Political Science from Bombay University, and prepared to take up employment with the Baroda state government. His wife had just moved his young family and started work when he had to quickly return to Mumbai to see his ailing father, who died on 2 February 1913.

Dr. Ambedkar' Family Life:

In the year 1912, Dr. Ambedkar was 21 years old and Ramabai 16. She gave birth to her first son Yashwant. As soon as Dr. Ambedkar obtained his B.A. degree he was being appointed as a lieutenant in the army of the Baroda province. He worked there for several weeks and soon received the message of a critical health condition. He resigned from the job and went to Mumbai to see his bedridden father. He blessed Bhima with his intense inspiration and encouraged his ability to fight adverse circumstances. His father Ramji Sakpal died on 2nd February 1913 at the age of 65. Bheema could hardly bear the shock of his father's death.

Dr. Ambedkar's financial condition was very weak. There was no support for his stay in London. Just as in London Dr. Ambedkar was not able to get enough meals, in Mumbai, too, Ramabai had to fight a lot to feed her children. Ramabai's brother and Bhima's sister used to work as labourers and their meager income had to be used for their livelihood.

Dr. Ambedkar's main focus was on the eradication of untouchability and fighting for the upliftment of his community. With this same intention he started prosecuting the problems of his community members. He started practicing law but very few people were able to pay his fees so his financial condition could not flourish. His personal life was full of tragedy resulting from his poverty and his illness. From 1912 to 1924 Dr. Ambedkar and Ramabai gave birth to 5 children. Among them, Yashwant who was born in 1912 could survive. The other children namely Gangadhar, Ramesh, Indu and Rajratna died in the course of time. Amongst them, Rajratna was his favorite child and he used to spend hours together playing with him but in 1924 when he was just a year old, died due to pneumonia. Dr. Ambedkar had expressed his deep feelings in a letter written to his friend Dattoba Pawar. He writes "it would be foolish to say that we can get out of the shock created due to the death of my child Rajratna. So far, we have borne the grief of losing three sons and a daughter. Whenever we remember those children, it is difficult to control ourselves. We have almost lost interest in life. After the death of Rajratna, life has just become a desert for both of us."

Ramabai's health was never good due to five deliveries. She had lost all her charm due to ill health. It was very difficult for her to run a family without proper income. They all have to face starvation. Both Dr. Ambedkar and Ramabai could not enjoy good health due to their weak financial condition.

Even in London Dr. Ambedkar had to face starvation. The poverty-stricken life and hardships regarding meals and medical expenses is mentioned in his letters written to his close relatives; he could simply express his apologies in those letters. In one of his letters, he writes that "I am trying my best to adjust and send money to you." Further, he adds "I am not able to feed myself and I have nothing to send". He even suggested selling out the gold ornaments of Ramabai to survive his family. Thus, his helplessness as a husband and father is revealed again and again.

Dr. Ambedkar had to face lots of hardships right from his childhood and it has resulted into ill health. When he returned to India in 1933, he was physically and mentally degraded. His well-wishers and friends advised him to take rest in the mountainous region and take ayurvedic medicine to regain health. He obeyed their advice and regained his health and soon in 1934 he started practicing law and joined the lectureship at Government Law College in Mumbai.

Dr. Ambedkar decided to build his own house at Hindu colony in Dadar area in Mumbai. Actually, he himself has designed the plan of his house but he was more interested in the library section as he was more inclined to books rather than other amenities. He had a stock of 50,000 books which were more valuable than anything else. It took two years to complete the construction of that house. But unfortunately, not a single family member could live in that house. Due to a series of problems and adverse circumstances, Ramabai died on 26 May 1935 when she was just 37 years old. Her untimely death greatly influenced Dr. Ambedkar. He felt very sorry for her death who had not only supported him in his public

life but also ran his family without making any complaint. He even apologized for not spending enough time with her as a husband.

Dr. Ambedkar' Health Issues and Death:

He was a busy person fully devoted to public life especially related to downtrodden and the underprivileged from his own Dalit community. But due to overwork and family problems he was suffering from number of ailments. He suffered from lack of sleep, had neuropathic pain in his legs, and was taking insulin and homeopathic medicines. The doctors advised him to have a companion who would be a good cook and had medical knowledge to care for him. He went to Bombay for treatment, and there met Sharada Kabir, whom he married on 15 April 1948, at his home in New Delhi. She adopted the name Savita Ambedkar and cared for him the rest of his life.

Since 1948, Ambedkar was suffering from diabetes and other ailments. He remained in bed from June to October in the year 1954. Three days after completing his final manuscript of the book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he died in his sleep on 6 December 1956 at his home in Delhi.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to Indians and the Indian Constitution is beyond description. However, his contribution towards the nation was overshadowed by his poverty, family life and ill health due to his overwork and the adversities he had to face. His straightforwardness, honesty and the attitude to work for his community and his urge to learn had become obstacle in earning money. His tragic family background also cut short his political and social work. He could have served Indians more, if he had good health. To sum up, his life was short but great enough.

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