



DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR AS A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER

Dr. Vasant G. Kore

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
Sangameshwar College, Solapur.

ABSTRACT :

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is one of the most eminent intellectual figures of modern India. He remained in the forefront of all social, economic, political and religious efforts for upliftment of the lowest stratum of the Indian society known as untouchables, women and other backward classes. Ambedkar's philosophy is essentially ethical and religious. For him, social precedes the political. He is neither fierce individualist nor conservative communitarian. His conceptions of democracy internalizes the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in its true spirit.



This research paper designs to show Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's political philosophy and its contribution to India. This paper also concentrates on his deep and abiding concern and support for the underprivileged communities, subalterns, untouchables, and deprived classes.

KEYWORDS : *Subaltern, Dalit, Liberal Bourgeoisie, Liberalism, Marxism etc.*

INTRODUCTION :

Ambedkar has emerged as a major political philosopher with the rise of Dalit movement in contemporary times. There are several attempts to understand Ambedkar and his philosophy. Confusion prevails among scholars due to the existence of diverse, and sometimes, contradictory theoretical assessment of Ambedkar. The social context of the scholars and their subjective positions play major role in the assessment of the thinker and very often the opinions of scholars evoke extreme reactions which either elevate or demean Ambedkar. Though he had a great influence on Indian politics from the nationalist movement onwards, till eighties, there has been not much academic debate on Ambedkar. The communities of knowledge and centres of power either ignored or deliberately marginalized him as a thinker and social scientist.

Ambedkar's thought, as reflected in his writings and speeches has great importance in tracing the history and growth of social thought in India. It is necessary to understand the philosophy of Ambedkar which is the theoretical foundation for the Dalit movement. The core of political thinking of Ambedkar is contained in two of his statements- the rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of society. He considers democracy essentially as a form of society of a more associated living and a social conscience is the only safe guard of all rights. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationships, in terms of associated life among the people who form a society. For him, social relationships are the key to democracy. Ambedkar is a social democrat in spirit and practice. His special contribution to

political thought lies in his linking up liberty, equality and fraternity to the concept of social democracy, which in turn, he relates to democracy as a form of government. He further reminds the limitations of social democracy in everyday functioning.

In most of the speeches and writings of Ambedkar, the central theme is social reformism. He often debated and confronted on the issue of precedence of social over political issues. Politics have to be necessarily connected to the social issues. The very foundations of democracy lie in associated living in society. On the issue of giving primacy to social over political, he differs with congress and socialists. This is well reflected in all his writings in general and his writings 'Annihilation of caste' and 'What congress and Gandhi have done to untouchables' in particular.

In contemporary times, once 'caste' got theoretically recognized and established as the Indian social reality, the established political and social theories got new meanings. Ambedkar as a thinker got prominence because of his scholarly conceptualization of the institution of caste and its functioning in Indian society. He interpreted the Indian social world in order to change the lives of the Dalit masses who are the victims of caste system. The situation demands proper assessment of Ambedkar's political philosophy in relation to other prominent political streams of the time. Ambedkar is a real philosopher in the Marxian sense. He has interpreted the Indian social reality in order to change it.

Ambedkar is influenced by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three grand traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, conservative and radical. The unique feature about him is that he has transcended all these traditions. He was influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, the pragmatic American and the teacher of him. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman had considerable impact on his thought. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative thinker of British, though we can't brand Ambedkar as conservative. Ambedkar's notion of liberty comes close to T.H. Green.

Ambedkar's philosophy is primarily ethical and religious. He thoroughly explored the Indian traditions and its philosophical systems in a unique way. He developed political concepts like democracy, justice, state and rights from his understanding of Indian society and the functioning of its institutions on the moral grounds. He is very critical of the institution of caste, which influences all the spheres of individual's life and the Indian society as a whole. He further discusses how individual is related to society and how individual's freedom is limited by other social forces. He is critical of authoritarian Hindu social order and argued in favor of democratic society. He probed into the moral and social foundations of India and gave new meaning to the lives of disadvantaged people. His was a rationale approach. Reason plays a role in his writings and speeches. The methodology he used is very scientific rather speculative. He was influenced by the assumptions of modernity. He is well informed in many areas of Indian history, polity, culture, anthropology and philosophy. He quotes many thinkers in his writings those who are influenced him.

The notion of community is central to his thinking. To say that individuals make up society is trivial; society is always composed of classes. It may be exaggeration to assert the theory of class conflict, but the existence of definite classes in society is a fact... an individual in a society is always a member of a class. A caste is an enclosed class. Brahmins created caste and it is extended to other servile classes. Caste is endogamous unit and also a communal unit. His political theory was premised on moral community. It was as an ideal to be realised. He was very much critical about the Hindu social order. He argues that Hinduism is not qualified to be a community. Buddhism was projected as the ideal having the value of community grounding on morality. He considers that Buddhism attempted to found society on the basis of 'reason' and 'morality'.

His conception of community is very novel. He does not confirm to either Hindu ideal community or Marxist conception of community based on participation in production process. His conception of community is moral and ethical. It is not automatically available for participation in common affairs. His idea of community has to be created through hard and torturous process of moral transformation.

Ambedkar had a lengthy discussion on democratic form of government in his writings. His conception of democracy is different from the parliamentary democracy of Western Europe. Democracy came with the principles of liberalism. His conception of democracy makes different with parliamentary

forms of in a significant way. Parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular government, a government of people, by the people and for the people. The nations that are opposing dictatorship and pledged to democracy too find their discontent with democracy. First, the parliamentary democracy began with equality of political rights in the form of equal suffrage. There are very few countries having parliamentary democracy that have not adopted adult suffrage. It has progressed by expanding the notion of equality of political rights to equality of social and economic opportunity.

He characterized his political thought broadly as liberal. In the liberal tradition, he tries to find out Ambedkar's version of liberalism to suit Indian context. He argues one may find in Ambedkar, a liberalism that has transformed into a version of neo-pluralism in the context of the new liberal theories of modernization and development. According to this, liberal state is conceptualized as a focal point for bargaining and relationship of exchange between associational groups of which a society is supposed to be made up. It is a shift from individualism towards group-based politics and collectivist goals.

Ambedkar this operational notion of state structurally geared to humanistic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. His ideal state was one, which all the three values converged under conditions of equilibrium. He is not a dogmatic in this venture. In Ambedkar's version, a liberal democratic state is the political system that can best tackle this issue. Ambedkar's liberal democratic state came close to Marxian and Weberian conceptions and he also differs from these conceptions. The liberal democratic state itself is not an isolated category and it requires an appropriate context of society, culture and religion to become a functioning reality. Ambedkar would argue that state is in fact a superstructure of a more fundamental structure-society. The economy, too, is a superstructure of this fundamental category. It means society is the base and primary, State and economy emerges out of it. He is in favour of normative society. Society rests itself on the foundations of normative order, which is religious order. To argue this way, of course, is to strike the liberal political theory itself at its roots.

Many thinkers and radical political parties made an attempt to project Ambedkar as a liberal thinker. Liberalism, as a political theory developed in the west has a theoretical basis and reflection of modern industrial capitalist society. It implies individual rights as natural and absolute. Ambedkar seems to reject the liberal notion of society as an aggregation of individuals related to each other as individuals in terms of the goal of promoting individual interest. He has given importance to justice than utility. According to him utility is only a secondary criterion for judging right or wrong. That is, primacy of justice over utility is axiomatic for him. By subordinating utility to justice in his philosophical analytical scheme, Ambedkar departs from the very first tenet of utilitarianism in particular and liberal philosophy in general.

Another question that can be raised is whether Ambedkar is an individualist in his social and political philosophy? Does he follow the liberal thought regarding this? The liberal thought maintains that essence of the individual is economic satisfaction, i.e. consumption. For the Marxists (radicals), individual is essentially a producer, and since production is essentially social, the individual evaporates in the realm of social. But for Ambedkar, individualism means transcending one's individuality through the exercise of one's capacity for moral responsibility. The locus of moral responsibility is the recognition of an objectively existing moral law or dharma. It is an ideal which Ambedkar considers central to his version of Buddhist religion.

Ambedkar's accepted many of the basic assumptions of Marxism. Its most important aspect is the identification of economic exploitation with private property. His understanding of Marxism was used in an attempt to formulate a historical theory of caste and social struggle in India. Ambedkar criticized Marxism on the basis of ethicality. He questioned the basic tenets of Marxism, that the 'end justifying the means' and 'religion as the opium of the masses'. Ambedkar considers that for both Buddha and Marx the end is common but the only difference is the means that they professed. The means adopted by communists are violence and dictatorship of the proletariat whereas for Buddha, it is love and compassion, conversion of man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. Ambedkar considers Buddha as first revolutionary since he rejected caste system and social inequality and for his idea of Sangha. He comments on the issue of religion, that communists have carried the hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between two. Ambedkar also believes that humanity does only want economic

values, but also wants spiritual values to be retained. Ambedkar tries to see the similarities between Buddhism and Marxism and also differences. Ambedkar argues that in India there is not only division of labour but also division of laborers exists. He also felt that economic interpretation of history is not the only explanation of history. Buddhism for Ambedkar stands for reason. In fact, for both Buddha and Marx the ends remain same but the means differ. For Marx, the means are violent take over of the State through dictatorship of proletariat. For Buddha, it is conversion of man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. Ambedkar put the question to Marxists, what will take place of state when it goes away. He expressed the doubt that the anarchic situation may take place. Ambedkar proposed Dhamma in place of it. However, Ambedkar developed his own version of socialism. He termed it as state socialism, which emerges from his interpretation of democracy. Ambedkar very much emphasized that caste is not only the division of labor but also division of laborers in India.

One has to understand the political philosophy of Ambedkar in the context of his life and struggles. For instance, in the initial stages he took the programme of temple entry. Later, he didn't consider Hinduism as having the potential for inclusion of Dalits. Also, he experimented with Marxists and organized joint agitational programmes of Marxists. After some time he formed an independent political party for Dalits. All these phases provide an understanding of the enormous dynamism of Ambedkar. It is wrong to consider him as 'liberal bourgeoisie' or 'social liberal'. All this criticism came from a universe alien to Ambedkar and the community for which he was fighting.

CONCLUSION:

Ambedkar's political philosophy has a great potential in mediating both liberal and communitarian traditions of the west. He connects the individual and community based on morality. He proposes the democratic, humanistic and rationalistic religion such as Buddhism is the source for morality and associate living. When Ambedkar criticises Hindu community for its oppressive nature, he does it with a standard of individual liberty and freedom. When he is talking about suffering of individual members of Dalit community he is projecting an ideal moral community based on equality, liberty and fraternity. So it is not correct to call Ambedkar as either a fierce individualist or as a strong communitarian.

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