



DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR AND SOCIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (April 14, 1891-December 6, 1956) was not a socialist in the typical term though he had an inclination towards evolutionary socialism; he developed his own ideas and emerged a socialist in his own way. He dissected the economic inequality and exploitation in an empirical manner. His socialism is innovative and indigenous as he analyses the exploitation of the people within the country with a social world approach. It is pragmatic, not dogmatic. It is humane, not violent.



He was an esteemed academic intellectual having earned the top qualifications from prestigious universities. He therefore looked at social problems from an academic perspective also; but to discover practical applicable solutions for these problems was his major aim. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the great Indian Constitution maker, struggled to find out avenues and means – intellectual, organizational and in terms of programs throughout his life. This study attempts to throw light on Ambedkar's quest for socialism in India with special reference to Marxism and Buddhism. He accepted the concept of class struggle but he felt that in the Indian set up, it had to be substantially redefined and ascribed a similar agenda to the Buddha and agreed that one of the major contradictions of capitalism was the social basis of its production in contrast to private appropriation. Moreover, collective farming, one of the major features of his model of democratic socialism, needs to be thoroughly reconsidered as it lacked viability. It is somewhat inconceivable how he could achieve socialism by eliminating socio-economic inequality without undermining the basic economic foundation of society on which the system of inequality was founded.

KEYWORDS: Ambedkar, socialism, India.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), the great Indian Constitution maker and 'a symbol of revolt', was one of the front ranking nation-builders of modern India. He is popularly known as the 'pioneer' who initiated the 'liberation movement' of roughly sixty-five million untouchables of India. Yet, Dr. Ambedkar, not with standing all handicaps of birth, has made, by pursuit of knowledge in the humanities, social sciences, politics and law, an indelible imprint on the body politic of the country. A glance of his copious writings would evidently show that despite his preoccupations with the problems of the *dalits*(Untouchables), Ambedkar has in his own way, made significant contributions to the contemporary political ideas.

Socialism.

Socialism has several variants and multiple interpretations. Usually it is linked to the equalization of wealth but has a deep meaning for the crisis-ridden social world. Ambedkar and Nehru looked at it from a social perspective, Nehru talked about providing equal opportunities to all the people as socialism but Ambedkar introduced the concept of equality of castes as an ingredient of socialism. He treated this aspect when he contrasted his views with Gandhi and inferred that the "reorganisation of the Hindu Society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is harmful because the effect of the *Varna vyavastha* is to degrade the masses by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed; that the Hindu society must be reorganized on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity".

Thus his social ideas touch the basic tenets of socialism which are common to all of its variants. Socialism focuses on the mundane world, there is no role of the divine order to establish the social world. This is a real and practical contribution of the doctrine of socialism and communism to human thought. Ambedkar too believed in the same manner. He stated that in order to achieve this object "the sense of religious sanctity behind Caste and Varna must be destroyed; that the sanctity of Caste and Varna can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the Shastras."

Ambedkar thus established that social construction was the result of the human actions and the caste system was its glaring example. He thus differed from Marx who advocated that economic forces were the only causative factor in determining the social life. Karl Marx had presented the economic interpretation of history as the defining theory of human life. "According to him history was the result of economic forces (and) as to Buckle and Marx, while there is truth in what they say, their views do not represent the whole truth. They are quite wrong in holding that impersonal forces are everything and that man is no factor in the making of history (and) this seems to me to be quite a conclusive answer to those who deny man any place in the making of history. The crisis can be met by the discovery of a new way. Where there is no new way found, society goes under. Time may suggest possible new ways. But to step on the right one is not the work of Time. It is the work of man. Man therefore is a factor in the making of history and that environmental forces whether impersonal or social if they are the first are not the last things."⁷

Ambedkar thus looks at the caste system as a social problem, a product of human thinking; illogically supported by rotten religious texts. Marxist analysis fails to explain this problem.

Ambedkar accepts that state and government are real entities for human development, rejecting the stateless society conception of Marx. He defined the socialist roles for these and accepted the establishment of equality and sovereignty of people their major work objective. He argues that "a Government for the people, but not by the people, is sure to educate some into masters and others into subjects; because it is by the reflex effects of association that one can feel and measure the growth of personality. The growth of personality is the highest aim of society (and) to be specific, it is not enough to be electors only. It is necessary to be law-makers; otherwise who can be law-makers will be masters of those who can only be electors."

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

In this section, an attempt has been made to throw light on Ambedkar's quest for socialism with special reference to *Marxism* and *Buddhism*. The article is divided into following subsections wherein section I concentrates on the caste system, which negates the very essence and spirit of democracy. Section II depicts the fundamentals of democratic socialism as a social system, followed by the model of democratic socialism as visualized by Ambedkar. In section III, we analyze Ambedkar's insistence on democratic means of social change and his ideological stance with regard to Marxism and communism. Section IV presents a critical analysis on Ambedkar's effort to prove the superiority of Buddhism as an ideal over Marxism. Ultimately.

I DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Ambedkar's obsessive concern with Hinduism ultimately induced him to believe that it was not congenial to the promotion of the socialist causes. To him, Hinduism was antithetical to socialism because it advocated *Chaturvarna* system that divided the Hindu society into four classes, namely *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra*. Caste system owed its origin to the *chaturvarna* arrangement in the society dominated by Hinduism. Contesting the argument that caste system was 'another name for division of labour', Ambedkar pointed out that it was not merely 'a division of labour' but division of labourers'. According to him, civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society, division of labour is accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments. Caste system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour- it is a hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above another. (1) Hinduism did not simply create classes but, according to Ambedkar, it also made it a matter of unalterable dogma. It gave an 'official gradation', 'fixation' and 'permanency' on the principle of 'graded inequality' in society.

II.

Ambedkar also championed the cause of labour. As a labour member of the British government, he made it clear that in all battles between the owners and workers, he would side with the labour. He observed that there were two enemies of the Indian working class: *Brahmanism* and capitalism. By *Brahmanism*, he meant the negation of the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity, and considered that the effects of *Brahmanism* were not confined only to such social rights as intermarriage. Under this system, civic rights were also denied. 'So omniscient is *Brahmanism* that it even affects the field of economic opportunities'

III.

During his student life, Ambedkar came across the writings of Karl Marx during his student days in London. Impressed by the writings of Karl Marx, Ambedkar once announced that 'the number of books he had read on communism exceeded the number of books read by all communist leaders of India put together. At the same time, it is true that Ambedkar never took any care to elaborate his views on Marx or Marxism throughout his intellectual life. A glimpse at his abundant writings would evidently reveal that he neither accepted the spirit of Marxism nor its contents, rather he was deeply instilled by the idea of Fabianism and in course of time, he developed his own brand of socialism.

IV.

Ambedkar's dislike to Marxism/ Communism is also evident from his advocacy of, and conversion to Buddhism. It may be recalled here that at the far end of his public life, he embraced Buddhism.(34) Before his conversion, in May 1956, he gave a talk entitled, 'Why I like Buddhism and how it is useful to the world in its present circumstances,' which was broadcast from the BBC, London. In that talk Ambedkar reasoned his keenness for Buddhism and accused Marxism / Communism of having 'shaken the religious system of all the countries'. To him, 'Buddhism was a complete answer to Marx and his communism.' For, 'Communism of the Russian type 'aimed at bringing it about 'by bloody revolution' while Buddhist Communism believed in 'bloodless revolution'.

CONCLUSIONS:

Ambedkar had identified himself with the most deprived and exploited section of Indian society. Thus, he castigated everything that inscribed poverty. For this, he was reluctant to recognize the traditional norms of bourgeois democracy and market economy. This motivated him to prescribe state socialism which aims to the eradication of poverty. But, at the same time it may be recounted that while accepting the reality of class exploitation, he refused to take note of its 'political revolutionary

implications , ' as he had no class programme. That is why he wanted the right to private property to remain sacrosanct,(50) and as such was reluctant to liquidate the moneyed class .

Ambedkar's ideas are reassertion of the socialist ideals but he takes a novel approach; he fuses socialism with the social evils of the Indian society and thereby expands its scope. Ambedkar is not a doctrinal Marxist or socialist. He evolves his own brand of socialism in which not only the economic aspects but also the social aspects are emphasized. This is his seminal contribution to the ideology of socialism.

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