

SOCIAL JUSTICE OF SCHEDULED CASTES & SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA – AMBEDKAR’S VIEW

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The Paper highlights the significant contributions of societal for Ambedkar to both British and Modern India, in general and voiceless people, in particular.

1.0 A Brief Life Cycle:

Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji (1891-1956) was leader of the *Harijans* (untouchables or low caste Hindu) and Law Minister of the Government of India (1947-51). Born into a *Mahar* (low caste) family of Western India, he as a boy was humiliated by his high caste school fellows. The Gaekwad (ruler) of Barode awarded him a scholarship, and he studied at Universities in the United States, Britain and Germany. When he returned to India, he entered the Baroda Public Service at the Gaekwad’s request, but again he was ill-treated by his high caste colleagues. In 1924 Ambedkar started legal practice in Bombay (Mumbai) and founded the Depressed Classes Institute (*Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha*) to uplift the untouchables. In 1927 he led a Satyagraha to establish the rights of untouchables to draw water from a Public Tank which was claimed to be private property by the Hindus. He was the case in the Bombay High court in 1937. Ambedkar also fought for the right of the untouchables to enter temples. He was a delegate at the Round Table Conference in London, where he asked for separate electorates for untouchables. Mohandas K. Gandhi opposed this as being divisive of Hindu Society. In the Poona Pact in 1932, both Ambedkar and Gandhi agreed on a compromise. He soon established his leadership among the *Harijans* founding several journals on their behalf. He also succeeded in obtaining special representation for them in the Legislative Councils of the Government. In 1947 Ambedkar became the Law Minister of the Government of India. He took a leading part in the framing of the Indian Constitution, in which he banned discrimination against untouchables and helped to pass this through the Constitution Assembly. Disappointed by his lack of influence in the Government, he resigned in 1951. He renounced Hinduism along with 2,00,000 fellow untouchables to become a Buddhist in 1951 at a ceremony in Nagpur, because untouchability still continued to be a part of Hindu society. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna (highest civilian award Posthumously) in 1990.

2.0 New Institutions: A. Pragmatist:

Ambedkar was largely inspired by the philosophy of Pragmatism, thanks to the influence of his teacher John Dewey, a celebrated Positivist in the University of Columbia, USA. Ambedkar was also inspired by the Historical method as enunciated by Goethe and others. The historical duty is to separate the true from the false, the certain from uncertain. Gandhi and Nehru were also inspired by the liberalism of the English, Ambedkar was not enamoured of it. The salient feature of liberalism is to eschew discrimination against any

one on the basis of birth. Ambedkar anticipated the new Institutional Economic Ideas, which emerged as a significant theoretical development in the last quarter of 20th century. The New Institutional Economics, as it is one of the chief proponents would observe, espouses the key role played by the social institutions in ensuring market efficiency. Market as an institution cannot function effectively and fruitfully in the absence of other enabling social institutions and values. In many developing countries, the market is intricately meshed up with institutional milieu. Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure, political, economic and social interaction. They are consisted of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct), and formal rules (Constitutions, laws, property rights). Throughout history, institutions have been devised by human beings to create order and reduce uncertainty in exchange. Together with the standard constraints of economics they define choice- set and therefore determine transaction and production costs and hence the profitability and feasibility of engaging in economic activity. They evolve incrementally connecting the past with the present and the future; history in consequence is largely a story of institutional evolution in which the historical performance of economics can only be understood as a part of sequential story. Institutions provide the incentive structure of an economy; as that structure evolves, it shapes the direction of economic change towards growth, stagnation, or decline (North, 1991).

3.0. Economics of Caste System:

In the same vein, George Akerlof, a Nobel laureate, makes a specific reference to the role of caste as a social institution, which vitiates the economic performance in India. After being to India, he understood that economic systems don't necessarily work as they do in standard economics, where markets always clear. The Caste system at some how provided me with an alternative model for how economic systems might work (Akerlof, 1970). The Social Capital (arising out of birth and the social connections) counted everywhere more than the intrinsic capital in a person. Ambedkar's concern for social justice and equality emanates from his deep comprehension of the evils of caste system, in general and of suppression and humiliation of SC/STs, in particular. He strongly believed that the institutional reforms were *sine qua non* for economic advancement or even political democracy. Ambedkar was fully convinced that the initiate for fighting for their SC/ST rights must come from within. People who are discriminated against should get together and fight for their own rights. Ambedkar was stoutly opposed to the fundamental of *Varna Shrama dharma* of Hindu religion, of which Gandhi was a staunch supporter. For Ambedkar, temple entry and inter-caste dining are just the gimmicks of palliative and platform value. They could not be lasting remedies to the cancerous evil of untouchability and continued subjugation of SCs/STs. Ambedkar viewed that the constitution and government should emerge as agents of social change rather than a stabilizing forces., He was conscious of the fact that the caste of a person could haunt him even after his conversion to same other religion. Ambedkar stood beyond Keynes and Karl Marx in supporting the cause of human rights².

4.0 Levying Income Tax on Land:

In early days, Ambedkar used his energies to free agriculturists and farm labourers from various ills of farming. He was the first Indian legislator who introduced *Khoti* Abolition bill. *Khoti* is a type of Landlordism prevalent in some districts of Maharashtra and also he moved a bill to abolish the *Mahar*

watan- a worst kind of agricultural serfdom by amending the Bombay Hereditary Officers Act, 1874. He strongly opposed the levying of land tax on uniform basis on all agriculturists - big and small. Sub-division and fragmentation of land have become the law of the land, because people have nothing else to depend upon except small patches of land. So it is the pressure on the land and surplus labour that is responsible for fragmentation. In his opinion, industrialization of agriculture is the real remedy for small holdings, but it is capital intensive and not possible under colonial rule. *Dalits* suffered socially, economically and politically under feudalistic rule. In fact, his idea of collective farming also did not give positive results.

His idea of levying income tax on land may be quite acceptable even at present. This is because the ownership of land is more skewed in favour of big landlords, who are very few in number while small and marginal farmers are in very large quantum. The progressive tax system suggested by Ambedkar is quite relevant at present and is widely accepted and introduced in the non-agricultural sector in India in order to narrow down the gap between the poor and the rich³.

5.0 Social Equality and Democracy

Ambedkar emphasised the democratic method of parliamentary democracy to realize the goal of social equality through the medium of economic equality. He referred to the relevance of social and economic democracy in a speech to the All India Trade Union Study Camp at Delhi (1943). He asked, why did parliamentary democracy collapse so easily in Italy, Germany, and Russia? Why did it not collapse so easily in England and USA? He answered, "To my mind there is only one answer. It is that there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than existed in the former. Social and economic democracy are the tissue and fibre of a political democracy. Democracy is another name for equality.

He approached the Constitution Assembly to include the principles of Socialism in the chapter on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State policy. He became restive when his plan was stoutly opposed. He was disappointed and criticized the "Objectives Resolution" of Nehru as it did not include the substantial programme of Socialism. However, he shrewdly prepared the preamble to the Constitution in such a way that its very terminology spread the fragrance of Socialism. In the last speech he made in the Constituent Assembly before the Constitution was passed he said "on Jan. 26, 1950, we will have equality in political life, and inequality in social and economical life. We must remove contradiction at the earliest movement or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of democracy which this Assembly has laboriously built. Further, he said that political democracy erected on the division, inequality and injustices of traditional Indian Society would be like a palace built on cowdung.

6.0 Towards Economic Development

Ambedkar agreed with Marx in a classless society but not in Stateless society. He maintained that the State should continue to exist as long the human society survived. In fact, in his "State and Minorities", what are their rights and how to secure them in the Constitution of free India (1947), he pleaded that the State should plan the economic life of the people on line which would lead to the highest point of productivity

without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also provide for equitable distribution of wealth. In other words, he sought active involvement of the State in economic development without the kind of Marxism, totalitarianism and State monopoly. He advocated that State ownership of agricultural land with a democratic collectivized method of cultivation and key control of key industries. His concept of State Socialism is based on three basic premises: (a) state ownership of agricultural land and key industries to meet the demands of the poorer strata of society. (b) Maintenance of productive measures by the State, and (c) A just distribution of the common produce among the different people without any distinction of caste or creed. As a matter of fact, he argued in favour of nationalization of agriculture and industries as the way to social equality. All along, he pleaded for democratic planning as the means to achieve social justice by phased planning of economic development⁴.

7.0 Indigenous Economist

Ambedkar was considered as liberal bourgeois and refused to grasp the insights he brought out through his political philosophy. Ambedkar was contemporary of Keynes at London. Earlier he was attracted to Keynes' analysis of industrial capitalism, but differed from many of his theories, which led to the exploitation of labourers. By experience and interest he analyzed economic dimensions of the social problems like caste system, law, religion, sociology, politics, probably overshadowed his services to Economics. He proved that Central government resorted to heavy taxation on the poor, who were already overburdened by the landowners. Ambedkar observed public finances are to be practiced for optimum welfare of the people either in British India or Modern India. Further, he advocated gold coin to be minted and the ratio between the gold coin and the rupee may be fixed by law. They should not be mutually convertible. Nevertheless, the Indian economy has an altogether different institutional set up now⁵

8.0 Conclusion

Ambedkar was an economist *par excellence*, which eclipsed by his migration to law and politics. He was taken as a social challenger for upliftment of *Dalits*. Out of grudge, he asked for separate electorate for untouchables for elections. He proved that Hinduism is a discriminatory in its functioning. The new institutions should evolve and bring equality among all. Parliamentary system and State has to bring social reforms. He fought for feudalistic rule in the country. Land should be nationalized and collective farming is to be practiced, which is failed. Industrialization would be in the hands of private and public sectors, so that State monopoly can be avoided. He is a supporter of human rights of every citizen of India. He became a darling person of downtrodden in modern and a living legend of voiceless people of India.

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