

Dr. Ambedkar's Economic Philosophy With Reference To Dalits And Minorities

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Abstract:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is known widely as a leader of oppressed classes who fought against caste system and untouchability but his contributions as an economist, humanist, socio-political scientist, constitutional expert is often ignored which is shocking for our economic fraternity. He wrote three books on economics and suggested many measures for economic development. He saw caste system as a major impediment on the economic and social development front. This paper will make the readers curious and will definitely open avenues to research more on Ambedkar's economic findings.

Key words: Ambedkar, Dalits, Minorities, caste system, Division of labour, Socialism.

As India debated the issues of Tolerance, Nation building, beef eating, it is always good the turn the pages of history and read the constitution which enshrines the rights to all citizens of India. The father of the Indian constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, perhaps would have foreseen these present day calamities led by fundamentalist forces who have usurped power and lead discourse, describing who is an ideal Indian and who is not. It is here we need to look at Ambedkar for guidance as he was the greatest intellectual produced by India over the past century.

Dr. Ambedkar studied many subjects, but he was mainly an economist. He was a trained economist with degrees from Columbia University in U.S.A and the London School of Economics before moving on to law and social theory and practices.

Economic writings of Dr Ambedkar cover a wide range of interrelated issues. These include his perspective on economic development and planning, working of the capitalist system, alternative economic framework, and the economics of the Hindu social order. Academic writings and the participation of Ambedkar in the decision-making process directly or indirectly influenced the national policy and planning in several economic spheres before Independence and after.

Ambedkar had dealt with economic planning very broadly where he was concerned that the depressed classes should not be excluded from the developmental processes.

In the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, the economics of the caste system had six types of consequences:

1. It divided labour
2. It disassociated work from interest
3. It disconnected intelligence from the manual labourer
4. It deviated persons by denying them right to cultivate vital interest
5. It prevented mobilization
6. It deprived Sudras of all economic avenues of employment and took them nearly to the position of a slave¹.

Ambedkar's views on the economic development go back to the year 1918, when he participated in an academic debate on the problem of small holdings in India and its remedies. Although his paper, "Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies"² focused on the problem of small holdings, in its formulation and implied solution it contained a theoretical framework for economic development. Beginning with a discussion of the problem arising out of the smallness of land holdings, he went on to analyze the backwardness of the agricultural sector as a whole and ended with the proposed solution of capital investment in agriculture and industrialization for the overall development of the economy.

Ambedkar significantly influenced the decision concerning the strategy of post-war economic plan as well. His views on economic development were reflected in his plan strategy. He emphasized the need for industrialization for overall economic development as well as for development of the agricultural sector. Poverty in India, in his view, was mainly because India was solely dependent upon agriculture; agriculture had failed to produce sufficient food to feed the people because of the maladjustment of the social economy of the country.

Dr. Ambedkar used his pen, incorporating philosophical tenets in the preamble and various other provisions in the Indian Constitution to remove the social injustice. For example, Art. 38 was incorporated to remove the economical inequality, Art. 45 was inserted to destroy the curse of illiteracy and ignorance, Art. 38 and 39 were to eliminate exploitation of man by man, Art.31 (A) was intended to abolish feudal over lordship; and Art. 17 was added to abolish untouchability which was the curse in the Indian society.

Apart from this Art.29 and 30 speaks about the special provisions for all the minorities of India which gives them right to establish their educational, religious institutional and also promote and protect their script and literature. Constitution of India comprises the vision of B. R. Ambedkar, which is particularly devoted to the principles of social and economic justice, non-discrimination, liberty, equality and fraternity.

According to him, caste – consciousness hampers all economic growth. It creates conditions which are harmful for collective efforts in agriculture and other activities. Rural development in the presence of caste relations would be against the principles of socialism. Therefore, the great feudal estates based on casteism must be broken up and the land be distributed to the people who till it and who can collectively produce things for the rapid progress of both cities and villages.³

Ambedkar was aware about the limitations of the capitalistic form of economic system under parliamentary democracy in ensuring economic security to the masses. He, therefore, argued for an important place to the "labour" and the "depressed classes" in the planned economic development of the country. He was particularly concerned that planned economic development should not only develop programmes but translate them in terms which the common man could understand, namely, peace, housing, clothing, education, good health and, above all, the right to work with dignity. The state could not be content with securing merely fair conditions of work for labour but fair conditions of life. A great responsibility lay on the state to provide the poor with facilities for the growth of individuals according to their needs. To do that, the government could not be a government of 'laissez faire': It would have to be government essentially based on a system of control.

Ambedkar's concept of State Socialism is based on following point;

1. State ownership of agricultural and key industries to meet the demands of the poorer strata of society,
2. Maintenance of productive resources by the state and
3. A just distribution of the common produce among the different people without any distinction of castes or creed⁴

In Ambedkar's view, the schedule castes (SCs) and depressed classes needed to be treated as a separate entity for the purpose of planning, and this provision was incorporated in the Plan objective. A plan document stated that "one of the objectives of the government would be to take steps to ameliorate the condition of the SCs and backward classes. Care must be taken to see that social amenities such as education, public health, water supply, housing, which are meant to be provided under the plan, work especially for the benefit of such classes, and that labour is offset by special concessions in the shape of educational facilities, grant, scholarships, hostels, improved water supply and similar measures.

With regard to economy of the Dalits and minorities, Ambedkar's economic theories revolved round the connection between social status and economic position of an individual. It is here that for the first time he gives a unique dimension to the problem of labour. He says that 'Caste Advocates' shelter in the name of division of labour as an essential prerequisite for the smooth functioning of society. Ambedkar found caste not to be just a mechanism associated with division of labour, but rather, as a mechanism of exploitation as it is a "Division of Labourers" as well. Ambedkar's economic contribution begins from his understanding of caste in terms of Division of Labourers.

Ambedkar then moves on to understand the kind of land relationship that dalits had with the rest of the community. He confronts the idea of 'Bonded Labour' being a deprived dalit at the mercy of other village communities, serving them perpetually. This is well explained in his agitation against the 'Mahar Watan' system.

Further, having understood that a majority of Dalits are associated with agriculture, holding just a small strip of land, he proceeds to make a viable proposition to fragmented holdings and says that the remedy lies not only in restricting the fragmentation of holding but also in making the fragmented piece of land holding viable by increasing the control over the factors of production.

Ambedkar felt that mechanization would lead to a more equitable share of resources and commenting on Gandhi's economic philosophy Ambedkar wrote, "there was nothing new in the Gandhian analysis of economic ills as attributable to machinery and the civilisation built upon it. These were old and worn out arguments, a repetition of Rousseau, Pushkin and Tolstoy. His economics was hopelessly fallacious because the evils produced by the mechanised production system and civilisation are not due to machinery as such... They are due to the wrong social organisation which has made private property and pursuit of personal gain a matter of absolute sanctity... The remedy therefore is not to condemn machinery and civilisation but to alter the organisation of society so that the benefits will not be usurped by the few but accrue to all."⁵

He wrote three scholarly books on economics such as "Administration and Finance of the East India Company", "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India", "The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution" and most significant book among his economic writings is "States and Minorities". This book stands as one of the masterpiece wherein he advocates nationalization of all the major industries. He was of the opinion that private industries are the means of unequal distribution of wealth. If the major industries are given to private organization, then there would be absolute exploitation of wealth and labor. Nationalization of industries would give security to the workers and it will help in equal distribution of wealth. He also advocated Nationalization of insurance, which will gives greater security to the people.

It would be the special responsibility of the government to see that early measures are taken to remove the handicap of these classes and help them to raise their level to that of their more fortunate fellow citizens. The provision of full employment as well as various measures of social security contemplated under the section of labour would also automatically benefit the backward and the depressed classes." The Central Government's irrigation and electric power policy during 1942-44 reflected this view of Ambedkar about the poor and their place in planned economic development of the water resources of the country. He urged the policy makers to incorporate measures in the irrigation development policy to benefit the poor and oppressed selection of society.

Further to go elaborately, Clause 4 of Article II of “States and Minorities” recommended:⁶

- i) Agriculture shall be a state industry,
- ii) Key and basic industries shall be owned and run by the State,
- iii) Nationalization of Insurance policy shall be compulsory and monopoly of the state for every citizen,
- iv) The State shall acquire the subsisting rights in such industries, insurance and agricultural land held by private individuals,
- v) The State shall divide the land acquired into farms of standard size,
- vi) The farm shall be cultivated as a collective farm,
- vii) The farm shall be cultivated in accordance with rules and directions issued by Government,
- viii) The tenants shall share among themselves in the manner prescribed the produce of the farm left after the payment of charges properly livable on the farm,
- ix) The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed,
- x) There will be no landlord, no tenant and no landless laborer,
- xi) The collective farms shall be distributes the water, draft animal, implements, manure, seeds etc.,
- xii) The State shall be entitled to levy on the following charges produce by the farms:
 - a) a portion for land revenue,
 - b) a portion to pay the debenture-holders,
 - c) Portion to pay for the use of capital goods supplied.

He urged to implement the above provisions as early as possible so that the economic development of people and national development as a whole can be possible.

What one must understand is the fact that Dr. Ambedkar was a great champion of Human Rights. It is he who worked for the equal right for Hindu women as law minister. He introduced the Hindu code bill which provided equal rights to women in property, education and other spheres. This effort of Ambedkar ultimately led to adoption of the bill, although in installments and a gradual manner.

Conclusion

Ambedkar was primarily an economist, his political achievements and the principled stand he took to emancipate his people overshadowed his contribution to the field of economics. His political ideas had a moral and value added purpose. His unflinching faith in socialism and mixed economy with the belief that it would bring a more equitable human welfare for the under privileged was the corner stone of his economic thinking. He agreed with economists like Sismondi, Ricardo and Malthus as they believed in equal distribution of wealth would solve many an economic problem. It is here that the idea of modernization of India went well with his idea of mixed economy in which the Dalits and Minorities could play a major role in a newly emerging country like India. Hence, he supported urbanization and industrialization as they could help in the emancipation of the Dalits and give an identity to the Minorities as distinct groups which would go a long way in annihilating the dreaded caste system.

¹ Shyam Lal, K S Saxena, (Ed) “ Ambdekar and nation building”, Rawat Publication, New Delhi - 1998. Pg 93

² Journal of the Indian Economic Society, Vol I, 1918

³ Annihilation of caste, ‘with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi.’ Address before the Annual Conference of Jat-Pat-Todal Mandal, Lahore, 1935, p.19.

⁴ Jadhav Narendra (1991): ‘Neglected Economic Thought of Babasaheb Ambedkar’, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 26, No. 15, April. 13, pp. 980-982.

⁵ Vinod Mishra, Antithesis of Caste and Class - An Orthodox Marxist Hypothesis, *Liberation*, April, 1994

⁶ States And Minorities - Dr.B.R.Ambedkar (1947)