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AN ASSESSMENT OF DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AFTER GLOBALISATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social democracy, as a philosophy, occupies a pivotal role in determining the social life of millions of oppressed and downtrodden communities all over the world. In the case of India, it occupies the central theme in the philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, where he identified caste and social exclusion as the main blocks to the real attainment of the social democracy. This paper looks at the ways in which neo-liberal market-economy impacts social democracy as conceived by Dr. Ambedkar and examines its implications for the millions of ex-untouchables. It argues that the institution of social democracy, which flourished in India during the era of mixed economy and state welfares, seems to be fast approaching its demise under the ongoing process of neo-liberalisation. The paper further argues that the fast expanding domain of corporate sector and free flow of global capital, in conjunction with the gradual withdrawal of the welfare state, will not only widen inequalities, but also stifle the growth of social democracy in India.

INTRODUCTION

Social democracy occupies centre stage in the philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the constitution of Independent India and the messiah of millions of downtrodden, reverently called Baba Sahib. The dominant and oppressive social structures like caste and the resultant social exclusion are what he considered as the main stumbling blocks on the way to social democracy in India. For democracy to survive in a country like India, it must be rooted in social democracy. To help emerge genuine and true democracy in India, Dr. Ambedkar gives a clarion call for the 'annihilation of caste' through constitutional and democratic way. His emphasis on the total transformation of 'public sphere' in colonial and Independent India distinguishes him from his contemporaries who were more concerned with the political freedom of the country from the British rule and its consolidation afterwards. As far as Indian freedom struggle is concerned, the contributions of Dr. Ambedkar were second to none. Furthermore, he reiterated that the struggle for political freedom should be thoroughly embedded in the social democracy, which in turn is primarily based on social emancipation and empowerment of ex-untouchables while making their participation in the local structures of power active and significant. Thus, for Dr. Ambedkar the struggle for political freedom would not cease to exist with the historic mid-night celebrations at the Red Fort, it will continue rather uninterrupted until independent India achieves equality and fraternity, the two equally important components of the trinity mantra (liberty, equality and fraternity) to liberate the people from the thralldom of ignorance, slavery and poverty. It is in this context, that the social democratic vision of Dr. Ambedkar becomes central to his post independent political discourse and praxis in the country. To strengthen liberty with equality and fraternity at its base, and to imbibe the true spirit of democracy in the country, Dr. Ambedkar devoted his entire life to the cumbersome task of annihilating caste from the Indian society. Neo-liberal market-economy is primarily based on delicensing, removal of import quotas, cutting down tariff levels, liberalisation of the inflow of foreign capital, capital goods, imported inputs, capital markets, industrial liberalisation, removal of MRTP constraints, opening of yet newer areas hitherto reserved for the public sector, tax concessions, voluntary retirement scheme, hidden closing of non-viable units, widespread use of contracted/casual labour, sub-contacting work to the small scale sector, taming labour etc (McCartney 2009: 212-13; Kohli 2006: 1361 & 1363)[4]. Before Indian economy could actually open its gates to the surging tides of world market-economy, the study of economic liberalisation had already

deepened its roots in the domain of social sciences in the country. However, in terms of content and scope, neoliberalism is yet to enter mainstream political sociology with vast body of pertinent literature remains confined to the discipline of economics (cf. Bardhan 2007: 397; Nayyar 2007:361-2). It rarely focuses on the intricate but often neglected relationship between caste and economy as well as contradictions between the emerging structures of neo-liberal market economy and the incipient institutions of social democracy (see also Basu 2010: xvi; Thorat and Newman 2010:7). In other words, economic liberalisation, caste, social democracy and intersections among them constitute the core challenges that India face today.

The story of the emergence of social democracy in India is different from that of Europe. Unlike Europe and Latin America, Social democracy in India did not emerge as a response to rabid capitalism and economic depression. Instead, it started taking shape in colonial India, as aptly argued by Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, “to liberate ourselves from centuries of misrule, from the scourge of poverty, ignorance and disease, from tyranny and bigotry, from caste prejudice and communal divisions” (Singh 2010:1). Social democracy in India, thus, emerged as a response to deep rooted caste-based social disabilities as against the fiscal crisis of 1929 and the upheaval generated by the World War II in Europe. The central focus of social democracy in Europe was on economic equality (Desai 2010:9). Whereas, in India the main focus of social democracy has been on deepening democracy while empowering the downtrodden to come forward to democratically struggle for their long denied human rights as enshrined in the constitution. In other words, it is the ‘social’ as against the ‘economic’ that provided impetus to the rise of social democracy in India. It is in this regard that the role of state affirmative action becomes noteworthy, which aims at distributive justice that helps downtrodden to make equal contribution towards strengthening the base of liberal democracy. It intends to empower them in such a way that they reap the fruits of hard earned freedom, at par with the privileged twice born. In other words, state affirmative action aims at rescuing the Indian society from the clutches of centuries old institution of caste and the all pervasive social exclusion and discrimination embedded in it (Jacob 2009). It is in this context that the neo-liberal market-economy and the institution of social democracy come face to face in a mutually antagonistic posture with serious implication for the sustainability of the growing sapling of liberal democracy in India.

It is in this context that the induction of neo-liberal economic reforms in India further complicates the existing contradictions between caste and democracy. Neo-liberal economic reforms were adopted to bridle the ever-increasing menace of fiscal crisis and to help India get rid of its chronic poverty. The problem of chronic poverty in India, however, seems to be not merely an economic issue. It has equally been rooted rather more deeply in the asymmetrical social structures of its Brahminical social order, which finds its natural ally in the fast expanding operations of new-liberal market economy in the country. It is against this backdrop that the project of economic liberalisation seems to block the way of nascent institution of social democracy in India.

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In the traditional Hindu social system, the ex-untouchables were kept at distance from the capital through the mechanism of purity-pollution principle. They were not allowed to own land, possess precious metals and keep certain kind of animal. Whereas in the present system of the free market economy, they were forced to

be fence sitter precisely because they did not possess the desired amount of capital or capacity, which are passports to enter into business in the market economy? Earlier, the ex-untouchables were denied all sort of access to capital in the name of sacred scriptures. Now, they were kept at a distance because free market economy does not entertain them because they do not show capital. It is in this context that the dialectics of inverse relationship between democracy and untouchability and the complementarity between market and caste assumes an added importance for the understanding of the impact of globalisation on the life of the Dalits in India in general and the structures of social democracy in the country in particular.

GLOBALISATION, DALITS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Globalisation is based on the principle of unrestrained functioning of the free market economy. In the paradigm of globalisation, state is reduced into a sort of security mechanism to protect its citizens from internal disruption and external threats. State is not supposed to care for the social and economic interests of its citizens. It is argued that the social and material interests of the citizens would be better served if they were left free to flourish in the market 'prompted by the profit motive to supply essential services'. The Neo-liberal argument goes further by highlighting the point that the interests of the individuals are best served by maximum market freedom and minimum intervention by the state. Thus globalisation robs the state of its welfare functions. On the contrary, the principle of social democracy calls upon state to play a positive role for the protection as well as promotion of the interests of the downtrodden. It expects that state need not be confined solely to law and order system; it is expected to function as a harbinger of social and economic justice as well. It is in this context that the extended contractarian tradition of the welfare state comes into head-on-collision with the forces of neo-liberal market economy in the contemporary domain of globalisation.

Globalisation, thus, poses a serious challenge to the formation of social democracy in India. It is often paraded as a custodian of enormous 'opportunities'. But such 'opportunities' are and whom they benefit is a question that directly concerns the Dalits. In an existential asymmetrical world, where we actually live, such opportunities open many doors to the haves. But the interests of the have-nots, a large majority of whom happen to be low castes, socially excluded, tribal, women, and other vulnerable sections of the society, are often neglected. The socially excluded sections of the society are the worst victims of much-hyped Special Economic Zones [SEZs] and the resultant consequent process of forced displacement (Ahlawat 2008; Palit 2008; Partha 2008; Kumar 2007; Gill 2007; Shankar 2007; Shankar 2008; Sampat 2008; Sharma 2009; and Sarma 2007). This has led to further perpetuation and deepening of the social and economic inequities, which in turn seriously diminish the values and principle of social justice in the society. In other words, it deepens the perennial evil of social exclusion through its much advertised project of new economic reforms, which in effect is less about 'reforms, and more about 'exclusion'. It has led to the closure of various industrial units in the public sector that "played havoc with the employment scenario of the populace as a whole and of the Dalits in particular" (Puniyani 2002) This, in turn, has increased unemployment and poverty on the one hand, and widened the hiatus between the rich/upper castes and the poor/lower castes on the other. In the first decade of the new economic reforms in India, the ratio of both unemployment and poverty increased from 28 per cent in 1989 to 48 per cent in 1992.

SCHOLARS VIEWS ON HIS ADVOCACY ABOUT ECONOMIC POLICIES

Professor G. Nancharaiah presented an overview of the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the field of Economics and its relevance in the present context. He elaborately presented the views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on the impediments of the caste system to the path of progress. He expressed that caste hinders the mobility of labour and creates informal markets resulting in less than desired outcomes. He also said that caste becomes a direct source of unemployment due to the fixation of occupations by birth. Prof. Nancharaiah presented the views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Trade Policy and said that the devaluation of Indian Currency in International Market would promote exports eventually draining a portion of production

available for domestic consumption leading to inflation in the domestic market. Such trends of Inflation would be against the interests of working class of population since the dividends of enhanced exports would be appropriated by the trading and manufacturing class and not the working class.

Professor Sukhadeo Thorat presented the view of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Economic Development as Development which carried equity along with it and coined the term “Equitable Development” as a connotation to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s view on Economic Development. Thorat heralded Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as the founder of India’s Water Policy by regarding the immense contribution that Ambedkar made in the policy making on the construction of dams to generate multi-purpose utilities to conserve water for irrigation and to generate thermal power, etc... The intervention of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, being the first person to receive a doctorate in Economics, in the aspect of the establishment of monetary institutions was instrumental in the establishment of a central bank in the name of Reserve Bank of India. He was presented as an economist who conceptualized the vagaries of surplus labour in the traditional sector and articulated for draining of surplus labour through industrialization.

Prof. R. S. Deshpande chaired the Panel discussion. He said Indian Constitution has provided a full protection against discrimination but its implementation has been tardy and evasive. It is not followed in letter and spirit in most of the places. But the worst comes when it does not find the right place in higher educational institutions. By definition, these institutions are supposed to inculcate the knowledge leading to decent human behaviour. Unfortunately, the kind of mismanagement and failure to inculcate the right kind of knowledge among the students has brought shame to all of us who claim to be the cream of the learned society. Divisibility on the social background has always been used as a tool of exploitation, and majoritarianism plays its disagreeable role in suppressing the voices that are raised against such blatant discrimination. It is the earnest duty of all of us to see that this cancer of discrimination is rooted out of the society in the best possible manner. This cannot happen unless each one of us, irrespective of our own origin, fight it out tooth-and-nail. Only then dream of Dr. Ambedkar will be realised and we will be credited for achieving the goal of humanity. Otherwise, we must take the blame for the entire mismanagement of the independence given to us by the fathers of this nation.

1. Prof. Kalpana Kannabiran spoke about the relevance of the framework offered by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to deal with the issues of discrimination in Higher Educational Institutions. According to her university is a place for notional change that comes through self-reflexivity and confrontation with one’s own beliefs. She strongly believes that a radical change in curriculum will lead to a collective action and encourage the expression of a collective anger.
2. Prof. Sasheej Hegde talked about the limitations of the existing institutional mechanisms to deal with social discrimination in Higher Educational Institutions. He pointed out that while on one hand, Higher Educational Institutions are becoming more inclusive in terms of the composition of students, on the other hand, new forms of discriminations are emerging. To address this issue he emphasized on the need to pay attention to the architecture of inclusion and suggested an evidence-based approach to build the same.
3. Dr. K. Laxminarayana pointed out how the coexistence of Neo-liberalism and Brahminism are at the core of institutional discrimination. In the Post-Mandal Era while the composition of students changed in favour of marginalized communities and that of the faculty remained unchanged. He criticized the increasing trend of interference of the state into the internal affairs of Higher Educational Institutions and stressed on the urgent need to identify and remove the structural inequalities present in Higher Educational Institutions.

Prakash Ambedkar spoke on “ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Public Finance”. He began with the need for expansion of Public Funded Education and the education to be financed by the state. He talked about GATT agreement on Education and detailed on how subsidies on Education are being cut down. He slammed the

recent New Education Policy proposed by TSR Subramanian Panel and being tabled in parliament. He expressed that the NEP is advanced as a resolution to privatize the entire educational system as opposed to the views of advancing public funded education expressed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Prakash Ambedkar argued that none of the governments were serious on the concerns expressed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on the spending of budgetary provisions on the development of people through financing education, health. Instead, governments so far, irrespective of political affiliation had excessively allocated budget for military spending. Bringing forth the views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Pakistan occupied Kashmir and recognizing Tibet as an independent nation, detailed that the nation suffered a lot by keeping the issues of Kashmir and Tibet boiling down, that the nation had to spend its major finances on maintaining army instead of resolving the issues, that the foreign policy of the country suffered on that account.

He articulated that spending on army deprives welfare of people. He articulated that BREXIT is new emerging alternative of the poor, whereas India is still at crossroads caught up between growth and development of fewer castes leading to the disadvantage of the majority of people. He also viewed that Reservation is not a developmental policy but was an assurance in a nation building, and asserted that only a small section of the society is controlling a vast majority of the resources and said that the majority should reclaim its rightful share and place.

Prof. Amresh Dubey talked about the implications of economic policy for growth and economic development for marginalized groups. He focused on inter-sectoral linkages in India and presented the view of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar that the deprived groups must be included in non-agricultural occupations. He was critical of the fact that sociologists have ignored the sociological contributions of Ambedkar. While commenting on the policy concerns he brought out the plans of Ambedkar in according to material benefits to the deprived sections, and stressed that there should be built-in mechanisms to bring in disadvantageous groups into the process of development.

Prof. Anand Teltumbde's focus was mainly on two major works of Ambedkar, 1) Problem of Indian Rupee, 2) The problem of small holdings. In the first work on the problem of the rupee, he advocated for pure gold standard, with a view that this will check inflation which will be in favour of poor. Explaining his views of Problem of Indian Rupee, Anand Teltumbde expressed that his analysis was oriented targeting the welfare of the working class. On the second work on small holdings, where Ambedkar proposed for collectivization of agriculture. According to him, industrialization along with state socialism was the solution for disguised unemployment and lower productivity.

Prof. E. Sudharani delivered a special lecture on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Women Empowerment Ambedkar and the Question of Women Empowerment – the fundamental problem is the very philosophy and codes of Hindu social ordering. Doing away with that is the only way out – e.g. burning Manusmriti (counter-revolution to Buddhist perception liberated women) is one crucial way to express the anger and taking forward the protest. Women Empowerment is not Women welfare. Ambedkar's perception of empowerment contained the ability to take decisions, control over one's body and participations in different activities, particularly for the Dalit women. Gender question needs to be addressed keeping in mind the heterogeneity in terms of social groups.

Prof. G. Aloysius delivered a special lecture on Ambedkar and Buddhism. The principal of governance and the internal face of nationalism is caste. Annihilation of Caste is the foundation for nation building. Ambedkar through Buddhism wanted to encourage the principle – one man one value. Ambedkar had a dual objective – emancipation and empowerment of the depressed classes. As caste has entered during a particular period in history it shall even leave the country at a particular time.

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEW ON INDIAN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The session brought out several issues in impeding agricultural development, such as the problem of small holdings, skewed distribution of land, negligence in providing agricultural inputs, non-implementation of land reforms, lack of credit to SC/ST farmers, and their impact on productivity. The session brought out proposals by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressing those concerns. The proposals of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as presented by scholars were : 1) Collective and Cooperative Farming, 2) Agriculture should remain in the control of State, 3) State should intervene effectively in ensuring adequate farm inputs, 4) Driving out surplus labour from Agriculture to non-agricultural sectors.

D. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN

The session brought forth the existence of Brahminical thought in the socio-cultural paradigm of India, and the non-existence of liberal social institution, which in turn denies power to Dalit Bahujan. An aesthetic paradigm is suggested to understand the concept of subjectivity. The session also focussed on gender disparities in the distribution of work and summed up that the proportion of females as agricultural labourers has been increasing over time.

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON CASTE, LABOUR, AND ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

This session discussed various issues on Informalization and forced migration which are two glaring realities of today's development paradigm especially with respect to some of the growing sectors like mining etc. The paper discussed the livelihood struggles of the migrants in informal gold mining and precarious working condition. Globalization inducing caste based inequality since the days of Colonial period until today. Based on the consumption expenditure data analysis shows that inter-caste inequality has become significant. The politics of ban on Beef and vulnerability of Dalits in this context was analyzed with impressive nuances. Also, discussed various Constitutional Acts meant for the safeguard of the SC/STs. When it comes to the space of capital once again the castiest approach is predominant as far as the profile of entrepreneur is concerned.

“ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: ROLE OF STATE AND DALITS”

Various welfare programmes and how the targeted population is taken away from the programme for political benefits of various political parties (through election campaign). Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan was appraised in terms of forcing the upper caste elite to come in touch with the job of cleaning which they have abstained from thousands of years. However, this view was critiqued significantly from the perspective of real life politics elite and cultural hegemony. Assessment of well-being of the disadvantageous sections (in united AP) in terms of various indicators like – Gross enrollment ratio; Operational land holding; Poverty; Malnutrition; Employment ratio disparity also does not portray any satisfactory picture. With regard to the implementation of SC Sub-plan in India, some serious issues have been identified – under-utilization and diversion of funds and the non-timely allocation along with prevailing leakages.

DEMOCRACY: CASTE AND GENDER

Caste as a monster and discussed how caste has become a source of religio-cultural identity. Dr. Ambedkar's theory of deconstruction and reconstruction of Indian society in this regard. Post liberalization India is characterized by increased dominance of the dominant castes while the welfare state has been abdicating its basic responsibilities under fiscal and global pressures. Globalized India witnesses increased visibility of caste violence in the public domain and the collective character of atrocities.

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