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Ambedkar's State Socialism: A Way Forward to Social Change in Indian Society

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ABSTRACT

According to Ambedkar, democracy or state socialism is an agreement to social and economic changes for eradication of the inequalities and discrimination prevailing in the society. The purpose of the study was an attempt to understand the Ambedkar's idea of state socialism. In an effort to achieve this goal, it was important to address his confrontation to all the main stream powers. However, why did he choose state-socialism in comparison to the scientific socialism of the Marxists? In what sense his ideas contribute towards achieving his main goal of annihilation of castes? The article also tried to examine how solid and practical the idea of state socialism was in principle. It examined that how the Indian socialists remain impractical in their economic interpretation of Indian society to establish the social democracy in the region.

Keywords: State-Socialism; Ambedkar; India.

1.0 Introduction

Dr B. R. Ambedkar's association with state-socialism is as much as Buddhism or Republican spirit of the country. All these words are clearly larger ideas than Ambedkar's concern for the eradication of inequalities among the Dalits. At a time when high ideal movements like anti-colonialism, nationalism and social revolution were echoed, Ambedkar chosen the cause of emancipation of the deprived people of his country as the sole aim of his discourse which seemed to be cultist or communalist. In fact, he was choosing the work having communal feel. In an effort to achieve this goal, he had to confront all the conservative powers with in the country, and he also had to listen to such abusive language as British's agent in the war of anti-imperialist. But on the other hand, some people understood that Dalit-emancipation was an essential part of the plan with the highest ideal of building an exploitation-free society, a pre-requisite of that plan. And their arguments about other movements, basically the social structure divided into pieces by the said movements, the biggest example of which was the struggle of Dalits dilemma could be taken for granted, questioning the claim of the struggle being carried out for their stated objectives without being

attached. This was the reason that when Ambedkar proposed state-socialism, some people were very pleased to see the move above the issue of caste, towards a socialist approach, that is, from his obsession with a sect, towards a universal philosophy. The people who wanted to replace him with Marx, found his idea of state-socialism to be very useful to achieve his objective of oppression free society.

Assurance of the protection to scheduled castes and other backwards castes. Ambedkar had prepared to present it on behalf of his organization 'The All-India Schedule Cast Federation' in the Constituent Assembly when neither he was in this assembly nor his organization had any representation in it. In the preface to this book, Ambedkar says that "I was my hope that the Constituent Assembly would elect me to the state's committee. Evidently, it has found men of superior calibre for the work. It may also be because I am one of those who are outside the tabernacle and therefore undesirable. I am not sorry to find myself left out. My only regret is that I have lost an opportunity to which I was looking forward for placing my views for the consideration of the committee. I have therefore chosen to do the next best thing-namely, to incorporate then in this brochure along with the rights of citizens of

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minorities and of the scheduled castes so that a wider public may know what they are may value them for what they are worth and may make such use of them as it may deem fit.” (Preface, States and Minorities).

2.0 Form of State-Socialism in ‘States and Minorities’

In the Appendix to ‘States and Minorities’, Ambedkar was explained his idea of state-socialism. He also states that ‘It is the duty of the state to act as the basis for the planning of the economic life of its people. The adopted policies that the peak of productivity can be achieved without blocking the path of private enterprise and which leads to equitable distribution of wealth’. (States and Minorities, appendix-4) This proposal proposes to introduce a collectivized method of farming in the agricultural sector and a modified form of state socialism in the industry. Thus, it talks of applying state socialism only to the industry and presents a model of a kind of mixed economy in which the potential of private enterprise is not already throttled. For this reason, Ambedkar understood the role of the state in raising and managing capital. According to his plan, the state was responsible for the supply of capital for agriculture as well as for industry. Ambedkar considered two important factors to increase productivity. He proposed the nationalization of the insurance sector. As he says that nationalized insurance gives more protection to an individual than a private insurance firm because it resolves to use state’s resources as security for the monetary obligation of insurance. It is necessary for the state to make necessary financial arrangements for its economic plan. State socialism was considered necessary for the rapid industrialization of India. Ambedkar did not consider private capital to be capable of fulfilling the responsibility of the importance of industrialization in the country. Apart from this, he understood that if industrialization was left only to private capital, there would be a situation of inequality of wealth like in Europe, so he proposed the ownership and management of major industries by the state. He also proposed to run such industries which were not major industries, but which were basic industries also by the state or state corporations.

In the field of Agro-industry, according to him, the entire agricultural land should be divided into

plots of certified size by the state and rented to the villagers for cultivation without discrimination of caste or religion. These rural cultivators should do farming on this through collective farming or any other method prescribed by the government and the cost of this collective farming which is related to all the necessary materials like water supply, animals, farm equipment, fertilizers and seeds, to be borne by the state and in return for these expenses, the state will have the right to collect appropriate rent on the produce. The characteristic feature of this plan is that it is associated with the choice of state socialism for important areas of economic life and the establishment of this state socialism by the law of the constitution so that the legislature and executive cannot change it in any way. Thus, Ambedkar is dependent on the Constituent Assembly for the formulation of such a constitution, which can give semi-permanent form to the economic structure of the society. In other words, the Constituent Assembly will create a state which will follow socialist policies. If the assumptions of this policy become true, then the specific policies of this scheme will bring the society to a very high level qualitatively collective farming proposed in this scheme.

In fact, collective farming with the system of abolishing private ownership of land, as it is favourable to the use of optimized inputs, is the ancient Republic method in the Indian context. It offers a far better solution than land reforms. Industries can significantly prevent inequalities under state-owned and controlled, although this does not mean that the industry will be controlled by the public or workers. In the context of the scarcity of capital, centralized planning assumes great importance, but it is possible to do this only by the state. In fact, the state has more avenues than the private capitalists in mobilizing resources for such a scheme, so as to ensure the desired improvement in productivity. In short, this is the model that has largely followed in the USSR and China and cannot be ruled out to be wrong on the basis of its affiliation with the socialist system alone. Anyway, there is a distinct difference between Ambedkar’s state socialism and the state-controlled socialism of the Soviet Union and China. In the said countries, where it was implemented by the proletarian revolution and conducted by the socialist states, Ambedkar wanted it to arise out of the moral force of the Constituent Assembly and be governed by the bourgeois liberal

state. Alternatively, while looking into history, we find that the establishment of socialism is a socialist state, which is itself a product of revolutionary change, and it is done by it, whereas the plan of state socialism is the imagining of a favourable state in an unfavourable socio-political situation.

3.0 Ambedkar's State Socialism

The above analysis of state socialism has been done largely within the theoretical framework. But the practical scenario needs to be considered separately. In the context of Ambedkar's state-socialism, it is imperative to look at the practical side as he was deeply concerned with the pragmatism of the society. In such cases the discussion of the theoretical side is automatically presented by Marxist theory. The practical side is based on the experiences gained from the events of the post-revolutionary period in the last century. While Marxist theory brings forth an error-free picture of socialism, efforts to implement it do not present a so happy picture of it. What happened after the revolution in the Soviet Union was certainly not socialism. The fact that the means of production were not owned by the workers but by the state and that the state was not a federation of Soviets or worker's committees, in which representatives were elected from the workplace according to the Marxists who revolutionized the 1917 revolution. Lenin, in his report of the Fourth Assembly of the Communist International, while presenting an explanation of his new economic policy, he said that capitalism was needed before bringing socialism to Russia and he supported 'state-capitalism'. He emphasized that the entire lands of Russia belong to the state. In fact, what happened in Russia was the nationalization of all means of production including land and the introduction of industry by the state on the basis of capitalist principles. The workers had neither control over the industry nor over the state.

The proposals presented in 'States and Minorities' are surprisingly similar to the principles practiced in the Soviet Union. However, this alone does not make them the same as the circumstances under which it was applied, especially the states where it to be applied. There were two things, one was a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state and the other a post-revolution state but both were identical in terms of content and purpose. Just as Lenin had foreseen

the need to accelerate the pace of industrial development not necessarily on a capitalistic pattern for a change in the socialist system, similarly the post-independence new India was faced with similar problems and it would have been better to adopt the program suggested by Ambedkar to become a democratic Republic. There can be no dispute about the relevance of those measures at that time and in today's context. Ambedkar was one of the few economists who understood the problem of Indian agriculture properly and suggested the collectivization of farms to idealize investment in it. Land distribution among the landless in the form of land reform, as most people take the meaning of land reform, will quash the hunger of the landless to some extent, but it will not solve the problem of poor productivity. According to Ambedkar's suggestions, nationalization of land and collectivization of farms could solve other problems including the problem of productivity. He was the only economist who fundamentally linked the problem of agriculture directly to industrialization in India. If the industry does not adopt the surplus of agricultural manpower, then the inputs in agriculture can never come in ideal condition and the problem of productivity can never be solved, so he favoured rapid industrialization. The only solution to the problem was the nationalization of big industries in his plan. This plan was not the same that the government adopted at the order of the big capitalists. Apart from the problem of productivity, Ambedkar's program was also concerned with the inequality created by unbridled capitalistic development.

4.0 Is Ambedkar's State Socialism a Solution or the Dilemma?

Is Ambedkar's idea of socialism a borrowed idea or a developed one? Having studied at Columbia University and the London School of Economics founded by the Fabian Socialists, Ambedkar was undoubtedly a great influence of Fabianism. His idea of state socialism was also born out of the process of his contemplation about the circumstances and contradictions of his country. USA and in England during that period there was a strong influence of the Flavian and liberal theories, which Ambedkar had studied there, and Marxism had already brought revolution in one country and changed the structure of the whole world. At such a time, even a person

seriously dealing with the challenge of creating a new world without exploitation could not ignore the influential ideology of Marxism. In such a situation, it was natural for Ambedkar to consider the Marxist system for the challenges before him, but he did not find it practical. In fact, Ambedkar was battling a unique problem of the complete eradication of social and cultural oppression, which had taken its roots in the economic and political spheres. Marxism did not play any special role in this work. Moreover, most of his ideas were based on his acquired experience of practical Marxism in the social structure in which he lived.

Ambedkar blamed the communists of India for being impractical in his economic interpretation of history in the context of socialism. He says, "But I find that an economic interpretation of history is necessary to validate the socialist argument that equitable division of property is the only real reform and that it should be implemented before any other reform." (Annihilation of Caste) Many of his contemporaries belonged to the Marxist middle class Brahmin family and were therefore unable to change their orthodox, impractical attitude. In addition, they lacked the experience necessary to relate to the suffering of the Dalit within the hierarchical system of castes. Like a parrot, they used to chant equality, but in his own environment, they were not ready to see its profanity. Ambedkar further argued, "There is only one ideal, that too is not just a known and imaginary ideal, so the question before a socialist is whether he believes in equality or not. The question before him is whether he objected to the mistreatment and oppression of one class by another class as a system and in principle, whether he would allow the continuing separation of one class from one class to another by tyranny and oppression." (Annihilation of Caste).

5.0 Conclusions

Nowadays, the socialism is a term used in a very vague sense. Socialism does not mean a government or a state ownership. It does not mean a closed system devoid of party-run democratic rights. It is not even nationalization or labour-management board or any kind of state capitalism. It suggests the complete end of all capitalist social relations. Contrary to popular belief, the truth is that socialism was never existed, neither in the old Soviet Union

nor is in China. The society in socialism would be like this which these things which we need to live, work and control our life like industry, services and natural resources, but all the people will have collective ownership and within the industries and services, the democratic organization of the people is the government. When a government for the people and run by the people becomes a reality for the first time, that is socialism.

As has been explained earlier, state-socialism can be said to be a pure desire in the best case and a combination of conflicting words in the worst case. Unless the state is transformed into a socialist state, state socialism has no meaning. State socialism is a combination of class-conscious approach and idealistic thinking. Ambedkar's state socialism needs to be viewed in the context of the possibility of creating conditions conducive to the making of a new constitution for a newly independent India. The possibility of achieving some progressive measures according to the position of the ruling classes cannot be ruled out. For example, the provisions of positive favouritism in favours of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which are in our Constitution, have come in the Constitution after going through such a process. These are always accepted as a long-term strategy, but these measures may not be so far-reaching as to disturb the basic structure of the society. Socialism is a completely different system. To think that this cannot be achieved without a violent class struggle is a fallacy.

Ambedkar believed in such means for the reasons discussed above. It is understandable that his belief stems from their overwhelming practicality rather than theoretical understanding. His categorical concern to ensure maximum benefits for the untouchables in his own life itself changed the direction of his politics from people-centred struggle to leadership-centred efforts. He was naturally drawn to Marxism, especially its goals, but his liberal attitude could not reconcile Marxism's scientific and violent methods. In the course of his struggle against the caste system, his conflict with Hinduism in the course of his struggle with Hinduism inspired him to give more importance to religion in modern times in building a positive person. It is difficult to understand Ambedkar's idea of socialism, if the context of the development of Ambedkar's ideas is not taken into account.

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