

Social welfare through social justice: Ambedkar's Economic approach to Societal Welfare – "भवतु सब्ब मंगलं "

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Abstract

Dr. Bhima Rao Ambedkar, an eminent economic scholar by basic training turned into a great social reformer. He was not merely an architect of the constitution but also a doughty champion of the human rights. A radical economist, Baba Saheb was an uncompromising modernist of Judeo-Greek enlightenment tradition. He stood for the cause of 'State-Socialism' meaning there-by, "put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprises, and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth." His philosophy was a unique quintessential of humanitarian sentiments of Buddha and the anti-exploitive spirit of Marx. He closely followed the teachings of Buddha and philosophical schools that followed Buddha's pattern of thought and teachings. His keen economic mind labored to bring about a social reconstruction through more equitable and civilized transformation of a society that had seeped into the agony of fragmentation on account of the insane practice of untouchability. He stood for the cause of equal rights and human dignity. He tried to create a climate of social democracy through social justice and creating a social harmony fighting inequities in an unfettered economy. His keen economic mind brought about a number of social and economic reforms that were agrarian, industrial, labour and insurance related. Ambedkar was in direct opposition to neo-liberal policies that promote liberalization, privatization and globalization. His aim was to reconstruct a just and casteless society. Welfare economic prudence alone can secure a socially just climate and common weal or good of every being, "भवतु सब्ब मंगलं ". His economic policy aimed at minimum dignity of all human beings. He was actually a champion of social democracy through social justice.

Key words: Social welfare, Economic reforms, Equality, Social Justice, Dignity

Dr. Bhima Rao Ambdekar dared to give India a parliamentary form of government in spite of the magnanimous differences that existed in the name of caste, religion, tradition and linguistic differences. He is justly famous for being the architect of India's Constitution and a doughty champion of the interests of scheduled castes. But, few know that he was also a pioneer of some very crucial issues pertaining to economic development. Dr. Ambedkar was an economist by basic training. Dr. Ambedkar, an eminent economic scholar by basic training turned into a great social reformer. His excellence as a sociologist, educationist, journalist and a parliamentarian is well known and accepted. His remarkable economist prudence is praised by Mr. Ambirajan as, "It was unfortunate for the economics profession that Ambedkar decided to changeover from economics to law and politics." His book 'The problem of the rupee' is considered as the magnum opus in economics. An organic intellectual as Antonio Gramsci calls him, one who represents and articulates the interests of an entire social class.

A radical economist, Baba Saheb's economic thoughts always had the greatest spirit of nationalism and forever propounded theories of overall development of all sections of the society. He was an uncompromising modernist of Judeo-Greek enlightenment tradition. He followed the works of various British idealists, including their interface with German philosophy and classical Greek thought. He stood for the cause of 'State-Socialism' meaning there-by, "put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprises, and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth." His philosophy was a unique quintessential amalgamation of humanitarian sentiments of Buddha and the anti-exploitive spirit of Marx. Ambedkar was in direct opposition to neo-liberal policies that promote liberalization,

privatization and globalization. The war cry of the liberalists is, "Away with all controls and the state, and let the market rule." Baba Saheb firmly believed that liberty from the state of control is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer.

His keen economic mind labored to bring about a social reconstruction through more equitable and civilized transformation of a society seeped into the agony of fragmentation and brutal and insane practice of untouchability. He developed theoretical and methodological tools for the development of the marginalized section of the society with his thoughts. He stood for the cause of equal rights and human dignity. His knowledge stood by him in all faithfulness and gave him a rare insightful sagacity and prudence, which he used with a prowess such that the clout of caste-war and stigma of untouchability was disillusioned with the anti-dote of economic solutions and remedies. He tried to create a climate of social democracy through social justice and worked towards creating social harmony by fighting inequities in an unfettered economy. His keen economic mind brought about a number of social and economic reforms that were agrarian, industrial, labour and insurance related.

His aim was to reconstruct a just and casteless society. His drafting of the constitution also highlighted his idea of social and economic justice. Certain articles (like article 15(4), 16(4), 17 etc) of the constitution seem to highlight his keen interest in these areas. He promulgated the best reservation policies for the upliftment of the socially degraded class and communities. He also did away with the age-old and traditional inequality and waged a war for equal rights and dignity. Also, he advocated the idea of establishing educational and religious institutions for such minorities so as to protect and develop their script and literature. He launched this struggle among the untouchables/ oppressed communities at two levels. The first tier warranted the ways and means of recognizing and identifying intrinsic value. The second tier was dedicated to opening up ways to achieve extrinsic value. He waged it as a struggle for self respect and self-esteem. He sought education as a means to understand and fetch self-respect and then consolidated it as self-esteem on account of united efforts as a community of dalits. He advocated this struggle of dalits and saw it as an opportunity to be equal to the other sections. He called it *shika, sanghatit vha ani sangharsha kara*. This was understood as 'educate', 'agitate' and 'organise' by Eleanor Zelliot.

His economic acumen firmly believed in state socialism for the rapid economic growth. He was a radical economist and tried to promote peaceful, social livelihood on the maxims of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. He called these ideals the rocks of a just society. He firmly believed in the idea of social democracy based on social justice, which alone will bring social harmony, solidarity and cohesiveness. Thus he tried to make professional use of economics by its systematic study and research. He used it (economics) as a political tool. He delved deep into ancient economic traditions, the classics like *Arthashastra, Sukraniti, Tirukkura* were intently studied and made use of. He also believed that the prevalent mindsets of social inequality and religious fundamentalism did away with the importance of nation building and the country has immensely suffered on account of this attitude of minimalistic and side-lined social development. Thus nationalism was his forte and he decided to imbue all his ideas as well as policies with this spirit so as to ensure total development as well as great cohesion between the different elements of the society.

Ambedkar's career was characterized by two distinct phases- the first one up to 1921 as a professional economist contributing scholarly books, the second one as a political leader championing path-breaking contributions for the cause of human rights for the untouchables, until his demise in 1956.

As an eminent economist he gave a scholarly contribution in the field of economics. There is a long list of his erudition earning him various honours and degrees. For his great work '*Pracheen Bharat ka Vyapar*' he was awarded the M.A. degree in 1915. In 1916, he wrote '*Bharat ki jatiyaan, shashan pranali utpatti aur vikaas*' and '*Bharat ke ratriya munafe ka bantwara*'. The latter (book) was accepted and honoured by the Columbian University, America. This book was published by P.S. Kings and Sons in the title of 'A study in Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance for which Ambedkar was awarded the Ph.D. degree. In 1918, he wrote 'Small holdings in India and their remedies' published in the journal of the Indian Economic Society (Vol.1,1918). His monumental book 'The problem of the rupee: its origin and

solution' was appreciated so much that he was honoured with a 'Doctor of Science' degree. His insightful comments on finance and economics were not only applauded but recognized immensely. Maharaja Sayaji Rao wanted him to be his finance minister. Not only this, the President of Royal Commission of Indian Currency and Finance, Sir Edward Hilton Young on 15th December, 1925 had invited him for an inaugural session wherein he was surprised to see that all the members of the commission were carrying a copy each of his scholarly writing 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India'. His extraordinary contributions in the form of academic writings, memoranda, speeches and reviews have been brought together by the Maharashtra government in multi-volume edition.

Baba Saheb was the most outstanding intellectual of the 20th century India. As Paul Baran, an eminent Marxist puts it he was an intellectual in real sense of the term because he used his wisdom for critical analysis of crucial issues of the society and tried to bring about social transformation. He can be more aptly called an organic intellectual who represents and articulates the interest of an entire social class, as Antonio Gramsci puts it.

Ambedkar was a radical economist as well as a strong proponent of land reforms. In his article – 'Small holdings in India and their remedies', 'States and Minorities', he elaborated his views on land reforms. His insightful comments like- smallness or largeness of an agricultural holding is not determined by its physical extent alone but by the intensity of cultivation as reflected in the amounts of all other inputs used, including labour. He advised large capital investments in agriculture to raise the yields. He even advocated nationalization of land, leasing out to group cultivators and encouraged formation of co-operatives in order to promote agriculture. He suggested intensive cultivation and state hold on agriculture industry, organizing cultivation of standard suitable size farms for collective group of families. He propagated State socialism for both agriculture and industry. He proposed that key industries shall be owned and run by the state. Non-key but basic industries shall be owned by state and run by corporations. He stood for efficient and effective industrial productivity. He strongly advocated industrialization and associated greater economic benefits with industrialization. Also, he sought the nationalization of industries to ensure to provide security to the labour work-force as well as allow equal distribution of wealth. He also suggested nationalization of insurance to ensure a greater sense of security among citizens. Moreover, he opines that the insurance policy should be compulsory and a monopoly of the state.

He founded the Independent Labour Party. Besides agrarian reforms Baba Saheb brought about a number of labour reforms. He successfully struggled against the prevailing land tenure system called Khoti, an extreme kind of economic exploitation. Also agitated successfully against Mahar Vatan, emancipating a large section of the rural poor from virtual serfdom. Even presented a bill in state assembly aimed at preventing the malpractices of money-lenders hurting the poor.

He was also instrumental in setting-up employment exchanges. Various irrigation policies, especially The Damodar Valley project was also a child of his creation. He firmly believed, "State Socialism is essential for the rapid industrialization of India." In absence of such a system private borrowing from the money market lead to high rates of interest and creating inequalities of wealth which shall result in extreme exploiting. He opined that the State should control all the resources of the nation such as land, agriculture, industries etc and that too through constitutional methods so as to be able to better serve the interests of its citizens. He also believed that it was the State's responsibility to work towards and develop the common man's life.

Besides, the various policies that were crucial for economic development his scholarly contribution in his perspective analysis of economic dimension of social ground such as the caste system and untouchability was also a great contribution to the society. Ambedkar came out with a hard-hitting critique in his book 'Annihilation of castes (1936)', pointing out that what was implicit in caste system was not merely division of labour but also division of labourers. Here it should be very clearly seen that his aim was not to challenge the hegemony of the upper caste but definitely to catalyse and propel fast economic growth in a socially just society, which will surely multiply the productivity through social solidarity. Thus securing social happiness through social justice, as guaranteed by just social order. In this process, he

organized conferences for this purpose and held a conference in Saswad in 1903 which was open for all castes and was not meant for the members of only a particular caste. (Phule,1980)

Caste fragmentation, untouchability and subsequent evils are termed by him as social disability that hinders and hampers smooth economic growth, resulting in social and economic inequality. On 25th December 1927 at Mahad the burning of Hindu law text *Manu Smriti* was one such action with which he wanted to boost the confidence of the victims of immorality. In this conference he ensured the declaration of human rights, repudiation of authority of Hindu scripture that taught social inequality (Phule,1980). Equal social opportunities are the prime outcome of democracy. Thus, he tried to re-vitalise the society by shading away the monster i.e. caste system and creating harmony and solidarity through emancipation and sense of common brotherhood. Meaning thereby, that without fraternity, social justice, is not realized and without 'social justice' liberty can hardly be realized and equality is a farce.

Dr. Ambedkar's speech on 'The future of Democracy' (on Voice of America) – "Roots of democracy are not the system of governance, whether it is parliamentary or social. Democracy is a pattern for social structure. It is a way of inter-relation of people in a society. He adored Buddhist religion for its unique way of transformation of society but in a bloodless revolution."

On 3rd October, 1954, (All India Radio Broadcast), he said, "My personal philosophy is the triplex of liberty, equality and fraternity that all through guided my life." He believed that this cliché of 'French Revolution' are not merely worked in political field, great principles of social relationships.

Conclusion:

Buddha, Gandhi, Marx and Ambedkar were the great saviours of their age. They tried to purge the society of the evils present then, by their doughty earnestness. Buddha made the religion so live and workable and life very simple. Gandhi aroused the masses by his charisma to a pure and truthful life. His ideals were easily cherished and easily achieved for that matter. Marx was a fire-brand leader who wanted economically egalitarian society without wasting much time. Unlike Gandhi, to him end justified the means. End achieved could easily let the means be forgotten. Ambedkar, a very well-read man who very dexterously re-researched history, enriched his socio-political antics, polished his economics to formulate a cauldraum that tried to purgate the society in a radical and pragmatic manner making the best use of legal aid and economic wisdom. He was not a dreamer and idealist like Gandhi, who thought that man is inherently pure and divine. Ambedkar's erudition and his conscientious awakening through the dismal and morose treatment that re received at the hands of the reckless caste mongers who tried to exploit on the basis of caste supremacy. Gandhi tried all the methods based on the change of heart (हृदय परिवर्तन) because he was very optimistic of man's divinity but Ambedkar had lost all faith in inherent human goodness. Like Marx he also saw economics as the root cause of exploitation and the exploited lot, therefore he tried a remedy with his lawful skill to eradicate the monster of exploitation right from the root. Welfare economic prudence alone can secure a socially just climate and common weal or good of every being. Knowledge, right path and compassion were his rightful ideals. His economic policy aimed at minimum dignity of all human beings. According to him Buddhism is the best way to promote peaceful co-existence, a serene symbiosis at its acme, annihilation of caste clout, the monster was a must before any kind of reform is to be felt palpable. To sum in a few words, he was actually a champion of social democracy through social justice. He used his economic prowess for critical analysis and social transformation. His society oriented economic policy sparkled with the spirit of "भवतु सब्ब मंगलं " or 'Bahujan Hitaya, Bahujan Sukhaya' i.e. Greatest Good for the largest number of people. His ideals strove for minimum dignity of all human beings, thus securing social justice which alone secures democracy and promotes peaceful social livelihood. He worked for the welfare of the entire social class.

His philosophy was somewhere between Gandhi and Marx. His philosophical interests revolved around metaphysical, epistemological and ethical concerns. The various elements of political philosophy like justice, liberty, equality, community, democracy, authority, legitimacy, and recognition were his lifelong pursuits. He believes that the ideal of trusteeship is good for both who is governing and the one

who is governed but both should be in the most elevated state of selfless-service- feeling the very palpability of the good of all. Ambedkar loves to be in a state of make-believe that both the parties – the exploited and the exploitant will not commit such an inhuman crime. He has always stood for the weaker section of the society but his analytical approach towards solving such problems never moved to the low ideals of snatching the benefits from the non-marginalised section and giving it away to the people that he fought for. He promoted fighting for the rights and developments of the weaker sections. He tried to philosophise his thought process and often came up with ideas that had both philosophy and practical aspect to them. Morality always occupied the central place in his thought process, ideas and strategies. The aim of his democratic thoughts was to eliminate the extreme economic, social and religious inequalities and evils from the society. His idea of state socialism was based on the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

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