



Ambedkar's perspective of Economic and social exclusion

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Abstract : *Dr. Ambedkar a legal luminary and multifaceted genius .of the most illustrious personalities of India. He celebrated as the Father of Indian Constitution. He was a Professor of Economics in the early 1930s and strongly believed that the fundamental cause of India's backward economy was the delay in changing the land system. His idea of economic realism was sought both freedom and welfare. Mixed economy was the cornerstone of his economic ideas and he advocated an end to the glaring social and economic inequalities produced by the capitalist system. His evidence before the Hilton Young Commission was an important contribution to the discussion of currency problems in India. He gave expression to his thoughts on such issues as smallholdings, collective farming, land revenue and abolition of landlordism. It covered nearly four important decades 1917 to 1956, and touched on all major political and economic events. His work "The Problem of the Rupee" was considered an instructive treatise. He wrote that closing of the Mints would prevent inflation and disturbances in the internal price level. He advocated that the standard of value should be gold and the elasticity of currency should come from this source. That great scholarship and hard work had gone into this book is evidenced by the rave reviews he received from the British Press.*

Key Words: *Social And Economic Equality, Caste System, Ambedkar*

Introduction

An increasing number of international companies and banks are investing in the countries of South Asia, particularly in India. This may have positive consequences for those countries. However the Dalit Solidarity Network UK believes it is increasingly important that foreign investors look carefully at their recruitment and employment policies in South Asia. Especially in India, there is a district and all-pervasive system of discrimination based on caste.

The United Nations and its agencies refer to it as "discrimination based on work and descent". What it means is that people who are born into specific groups, trades or castes are unable to escape from the stigma of their background or their origins. Hence those born as leather workers, barbers, agricultural workers or manual scavengers will remain in those employment sectors all their lives. Sometimes people escape from the system by moving to the large towns or cities, but overall the system remains heavily in place. "Dalit" is a term which



has had increasing currency in recent years. Literally, it means "the oppressed"

It encompasses peoples who used to be called untouchables or Harijans who are often also referred to in the constitution of India. Adivasi is a term which refers to those who are members of "Scheduled Tribes". That is, individuals who are racially distinct, as indigenous peoples, in contradistinction to the Caucasian peoples who invaded and settled India centuries ago. There is legislation stemming from the Indian Constitution which outlaws caste discrimination. The Chair of the committee which wrote the constitution of the Republic of India was Dr. Ambedkar. He was a highly educated Dalit who was admitted into Gray's Inn and was called to the Bar.

He also completed his second Doctoral studies in the London School of Economics and his thesis was subsequently published as "The Problem of the rupee". Ambedkar became an all-India figure and the undisputed leader of the Dalits. He used this vantage-point successfully to question with blunt and militant doggedness the claim of Gandhi to represent all of India and especially the Dalits. He died in 1956 having served as India's first Law Minister

Under the constitution, the Republic of India is empowered to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker parts of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

To achieve this aim, the State has used a two-fold approach: the provision of legal safeguards against discrimination, and a Reservation Policy in the State sector and

State Supported Sector. Subsequently, there has been further legislation, which has introduced penalties for specific examples of caste discrimination. These include the 1989 Prevention of Atrocities Act, the 1993 Protection of Human Rights Act, and the 1993 Employment of Manual Scavengers Act. However, these laws are far from effective. The Reservation Policy allocates 17 per cent of public sector jobs to Scheduled Castes, and a further 8 per cent to Scheduled Tribes. This approximately reflects their respective percentages in the population as a whole. Since the inception of the Reservation Policy following independence in 1947, there has been a significant increase in the number of Dalit and Adivasi government employees but this is for a population of between about 250 million Dalits and Adivasis (167 million Dalits, and 86 million Adivasis, in 2001). The 60 years after independence, the raw percentages in government employment and public sector undertakings now do very roughly reflect the percentage of the population which are Dalit and Adivasi. Because the Reservation Policy does not extend to the private sector recruitment is not done just as to quota systems.

Therefore, it is not possible to get comparative figures for the proportion of Dalits and Adivasi employed in the private sector, nor -most importantly- the seniority of jobs they hold. This is unfortunate, because the private sector, in relation to the State Sector and State Supported Sector, is rather a big payer. 76 per cent of the workforce is engaged in the private sector and only 24 per cent is employed in the State Sector and the State Supported Sector. The present context is also that the State Sector and



the State Supported Sector are shrinking, while the private sector is expanding.

This is a negative situation, both in terms of human rights, and in terms of economic potential. In the New York Times recently described the typing completion, in English, the journalist had with an eight-year old Dalit girl in a village about an hour's drive - and ten centuries- from Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley". The eight year old, he said, "left me in the dust, to the cheering delight of her classmates". It is important to examine the potential which is being lost because of the caste system. The United Progressive Alliance government in New Delhi is committed to exploring the expansion of the reservation system, into the private sector. In the Indian Express, the state government of Maharashtra is already preparing such legislation.

Foreign investment in India is high, and increasing, not the least because it is viewed as a stable country with a high growth rate. Economically, India is a happening country. The caste system has specific effects, when it comes to recruitment of workers for industries which are being developed without side capital and technological know how.

To respond to this situation DSN-UK, a member of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, is proposing a set of employment principles for foreign investors in South Asia.

After a series of consultations spread over a year with the private, public, and charities sectors, we have finalized what we shall call the Ambedkar Principles, and are pleased to be launching them formally on the 20 July 2006.

Ambedkar's Economic Ideology

Dr. Ambedkar's contribution of Indian economic thought which has originated from Kautilya to Dadabhai Naoroji leads towards the economic nationalism of India. He was struggled whole life for the liberation of the masses from the clutches of the bourgeois or the conservative economic system. Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat has opined that, Dr Ambedkar descended the Indian skies like a meteor, lighting up the freedom movement with a viable economic vision and road map, charted a constitutional democracy which, as he often said, could take us to the revolutionary goal of equality, liberty and fraternity.

Ambedkar's Socio-Economic Philosophy:

It should be evident that Ambedkar made phenomenal contributions to the evolution of Indian economic thought and in addressing India's economic problems. The Indian society has done a great injustice to itself by ignoring the economic thoughts of him for so long. There is no doubt that his contribution to the Indian economic thought has been varied and diverse. Indeed, all of his contributions as an economist emanate from a clear and consistent economic philosophy. In this concluding an attempt has been made to highlight the economic philosophy underlying his contributions by analysing the focal points of his scholarly writings and by identifying the thrust areas of various mass movements initiated by him.

Social Status and Caste System:-

Traditionally, although the political power lay with the Kshatriyas, historians portrayed the Brahmins as custodians and interpreters of Dharma, who enjoyed



much prestige and many advantages. Fa Hien, a Buddhist pilgrim from China, visited India around 400 AD. Only the lot of the Chandals he found unenviable; outcastes by reason their degrading work as disposers of dead, they were universally shunned. But no other part of the population were notably disadvantaged, no other caste distinctions attracted comment from the Chinese pilgrim, and no oppressive caste system drew forth his surprised censure.

In this period kings of Sudra and Brahmin origin were as common as those of Kshatriya varna and caste system was not wholly prohibitive and repressive. The castes did not constitute a rigid description or the social status of a group. Since British society was divided by class, the British attempted to equate the Indian caste system to their own social class system.

They saw caste as an indicator of occupation, social standing, and intellectual ability. Intentionally or unintentionally, the caste system became more rigid during the British Raj, when the British started to enumerate castes during the ten year census and codified the system under their rule.

The Harijans, or the people outside the caste system, had the lowest social status. The Harijans, earlier referred to as untouchables by some, worked in what were seen as unhealthy, unpleasant or polluting jobs. In the past, the Harijans suffered from social segregation and restrictions, in addition to extreme poverty.

They were not allowed temple worship with others, nor water from the same sources. Persons of higher castes would not interact with them. If somehow a member of a higher caste

came into physical or social contact with an untouchable, the member of the higher caste was defiled, and had to bathe thoroughly to purge him or herself of the impurity.

Social discrimination developed even among the Harijans; sub-castes among Harijans, such as dhobi and nai, would not interact with lowr-order Bhangis, who were described as outcastes even among outcastes. Sociologists have commented on the historical advantages offered by a rigid social structure as well as its drawbacks.

While caste is now seen as anachronistic, in its original form the caste system served as an instrument of order in a society where mutual consent rather than compulsion ruled; where the ritual rights and the economic obligations of members of one caste or sub-caste were strictly circumscribed in relation to those of any other caste or sub-caste; where one was born into one's caste and retained one's station in society for life; where merit was inherited, where equality existed within the caste, but inter-caste relations were unequal and hierarchical.

A well-defined system of mutual independence through a division of labour created security within community.

In addition, the division of labour on the basis of ethnicity allowed immigrants and foreigners to quickly integrate into their own caste niches. The caste system played an influential role in shaping economic activities, where it functioned much like medieval European guilds, ensuring the division of labour, providing for the training of apprentices and, in some cases, allowing manufacturers to achieve narrow specialization.



For instance, in certain regions, producing each variety of cloth was the specialty of a particular sub-caste. Additionally, some philosophers have argued that the majority of people would be comfortable in stratified endogamous groups, as they were in ancient times

CASTE MOBILITY:-

Some scholars believe that the relative ranking of other castes was fluid or differed from one place to another prior to the arrival of the British. Sociologists such as Bernard Buber and Marriott McKim describe how the perception of the caste system as a static and textual static and textual stratification has given way to the perception of the caste system as a more processual, empirical and contextual stratification.

Other sociologists such as Y.B. Damle have applied theoretical models to explain mobility and flexibility in the caste system in India. These scholars, gropes of lower -caste individuals could seek to elevate the status of their caste by attempting to emulate the practices of higher castes.

Flexibility in caste laws permitted very low-caste religious clerics such as Valmiki to compose the Ramayana, which became a central work of Hindu scripture. There is also precedent of certain Shudra families within the temples of the Sri Vaishnava sect in South India elevating their caste.

The following is a list of changes in varna cited in Hindu texts:

a) Manu eldest son (Priyavrata) became king, a Kshatriya. out of his ten sons seven became Brahman. Their names were Mahavira, Kavi and Savan.

b) Kavash -ailush was born to a Sudra and attained varn of a Rishi. He became mantra - drashta to numerous Vedic mantras in Rig-Veda 10th Mandal.

c) Jabala's son (Satyakama) born from unknown father became Rishi by his equalities.s

d) (Matanga) became a Rishi after his birth in low varna.

Some psychologists, mobility across broad caste lines may have been minimal though sub -caste (jatis) may have changed their social status over the generations by fission, relocation, and adoption of new rituals. Sociologist M.N.Srinivas has also debated the question of rigidity in Caste. In an ethnographic study of the Coorgs of Karnataka, he observed considerable flexibility and mobility in their caste hierarchies. He asserts that the caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time; instead, movement has always been possible, especially in the middle regions of the hierarchy.

It was always possible for groups born into a lower caste to rise to higher position by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism i.e. adopt the customs of the higher castes. While theoretically forbidden the process was not uncommon in practice. The concept of sanskritization, or the adoption of upper-caste norms by the lower castes, addressed the complexity and fluidity of caste relations.

Conclusion:-

The fact that many of the dynasties were of obscure origin suggests some social mobility, a person of any caste, having once acquired political power, could also acquire a genealogy connecting him with



the traditional lineages and conferring Kshatriya status. A number of new castes, such as the Kayasthas (scribblers and Khatri (traders). The Brahmanic sources, they originated from intercaste marriages, but this is clearly an attempt at rationalizing their rank in the hierarchy. Khatri appears to be unquestionably a Prakritised form of the Sanskrit Kshatriya. Many of these new castes played a major role in society. The hierarchy of castes did not have a uniform distribution throughout the country.

References

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5. *Kesavananda Bharti v. State of Kerala* [(1973) 4 SCC 225 (424)].

6. For example, Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees Right of Life and Personal Liberty to all persons (both citizens as well as non-citizens).

7. Constitution of India : Article 13.

8. Constitution of India, Article 37.

9. Austin, Granville, supra : note.2. Also see, *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India* [AIR 1980 SC 1789 (1805-1810)].