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BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR'S IDEAS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Let us accept the fact that Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has been victim of a process of reductionism. Mainstream media, academia and intelligentsia have played a dominant role in this process of reductionism. As a result he has been viewed and reviewed only as 'a Dalit Leader'. Some progressive intellectuals have at the most called him 'Chief Architect of the Indian Constitution'. In turn his contributions in the spheres of understanding individual, caste, Hindu Social order, problems of Hindu women, Indian minorities, nation and nation building etc. from an alternative perspective have been fully blacked out. Above all his ideas about social justice have also not caught the imagination of the mainstream academia and intelligentsia.

Thanks to the Dalit movement led by the Dalits themselves; Babasaheb Ambedkar has got such visibility that no other leader of modern India has. On the basis of association of masses to a particular leader, number of statues of a particular leader erected by the individuals on their own not with the help of government, types of celebrations on the occasion of his birth and conversion anniversaries and commemoration on his Mahaparinibban anniversaries, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar can be termed as the omnipresent organic leader of modern India. His contribution in reviving Buddhism in India and subsequently his association with the world's Buddhist community has made Babasaheb acceptable in the countries where ever Buddhism is practiced. Moreover, in this era of globalization with the information revolution and presence of Dalit Diaspora, Babasaheb Ambedkar is revered all over the world and truly he has become a Global icon. The poem below explains most of the facets of significant personality of Babasaheb and different roles he has played during his lifetime. The poem, narrated at the grassroots in the Hindi heartland, is translated by the author here to make the point:

Baba the Great Words to Dumb Ears to deaf Respect to Dalits Equal rights to women Charity of husband to Kastoomba Charity of life to Gandhi Constitution to India knowledge of Buddhist philosophy to the world such was Baba the great!

Today Babasaheb Ambedkar is accepted not only as a Dalit leader or only a Constitution maker but also as a ‘nation builder’, a human rights, champion, and ‘Global Icon’. This acceptance of Babasaheb Ambedkar by the masses in general and global community in particular has forced the mainstream academia and intelligentsia in India to include Ambedkar nominally or notionally in the curriculum of social sciences, although, he is not taught in curriculum at different levels of education — primary, secondary or higher. The irony is that even if he is taught, no questions are asked on him in the examination and if a question is asked it is asked in optional. This whole attitude towards an icon of erstwhile-marginalized community proves the point of the reductionism and blackout of the icon. Not going into details of his larger ideas and role of Dr. Ambedkar’ leadership this paper is a humble effort to understand and analyze how Babasaheb Ambedkar conceptualized the principles of social justice. However, before we analyze his ideas of social justice let us look at the concept of social justice as propounded by the different social scientists. Based on the principles enshrined in the scientific definition of Social justice we will evolve a ‘purposive’ definition of social justice with principles as envisaged by Babasaheb Ambedkar.

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Plato defined social justice as, “the principle of a society consisting of different types of men... who have combined the impulse of their need for one another and their concentration on their combination in one society and their concentration on their separate functions, have made a whole which is perfect because it is the product of image of the whole of the human mind (Republic 368d quoted in Mohapatra 1999)”. In modern times the term social justice was first used in 1840 by a Sicilian priest, Luigi Taparelli d’ Azeglio. However, Antonio Rasmini Serbasti gave the term prominence in his work, La constitutione Civile Secodo La Giurtizia Sociale in the year 1848 (Noval 2000: 11 quoted in Yadav: 2006).

Further, in a series of articles beginning with “Justice as Fairness” John Rawls propounded a contractualist theory of Justice as it applies to institutions and practices. It is based on the notions of fairness and reciprocity. Rawls believed that his theory of justice is an improvement over utilitarian accounts of justice as maximum welfare. John Rawls developed the following principles of justice:

- 1) Each person is to have an equal right to most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others.
- 2) Social and economic inequities are arbitrary unless they are reasonably expected to be to the advantage of the representative man in each income class.

2) Inequalities are to attach to positions and offices equally open to all (Choptiany 1973:146).

Similarly taking a leaf from Rawl's theory of social justice, Beteile (2005: 417), argues that, "the fundamental issue in distributive justice is equality; a more equal or at least a less unequal distribution of the benefits and of social co-operation". He opines that, "In that sense distributive justice to go beyond equality in the purely formal sense: equality before the law, seeks to go beyond equality in the purely formal sense: equality before the law, the equal protection of the laws, or even formal equality of opportunity. Its central concern is, in the language of Rawl 'to address the bias of contingencies in the in the direction of equality'... Any attempt to promote distributive justice must begin with a consideration of the existing inequalities in society...it is essential to keep in sight both inequalities between individual and disparities. Disparities between groups have been historically go great significance in Indian society".

Plato and Ralwa's concept of social justice would mean giving every man his due. The basic aim of social justice is to remove the imbalances in the social, political and economic life of the people to create a just society. In terms of culture-specificity, the term social justice has a different meaning in Indian society. It means dispensing justice to those to whom it has been systematically denied in the past because of an established social structure.

INFERRING MEANING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM AMBEDKAR'S WRITINGS

It is a fact that Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar did not propound any specific definition or theory of "Social Justice" per se. His thoughts are eloquently portrayed in his writings and speeches published posthumously. On the basis of these we can easily argue that Ambedkar has mentioned multiple principles for the establishment of an open and just social order in general and Indian society in particular. Therefore with the help of these elements we can carve out a theory of social justice, what can then be then referred as Ambedkar's theory of Social Justice? We can extract five basic principles, from writings and speeches of Ambedkar, through which justice can be dispensed in the society. These are:

1. Establishing a society where individual becomes the means of all social purposes
2. Establishment of society based on equality, liberty and fraternity
3. Establishing democracy- political, economic and social.
4. Establishing democracy through constitutional measures and



5. Establishing democracy by breaking monopoly of upper strata on political power

Going by the principles of Ambedkar's theory of social justice, Ambedkar was of the opinion that Social Justice can be dispensed in a free social order in which an individual is end in itself. Similarly, the terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity. In a way these principles of social justice are similar to the principles of social justice as mentioned in Rawl's theory. Let us look these principles in operation.

Arguing a case for open social order in his writings Ambedkar emphasized that generally there are two fundamental and essentials of a free social order. According to him, "The first is that the individual is an end himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and the development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary"(Ambedkar 1987:95). It is with this aim he had rejected village as a unit of governance and adopted the individual as its unit. He vehemently criticized the part played by village communities in the history and congratulated the Drafting committee for accepting individual as the unit of governance (Ambedkar 1994:61-62). Ambedkar had argued for individual as end itself as he was fully aware of the fact that, "The Hindu social order does not recognize the individual as a center of social purpose... For the Hindu social order is based principally on class or Varna and not on individuals... (Ambedkar 1987:99).

IDEAL SOCIOETY OF DR. AMBEDKAR

In fact Ambedkar has always been for establishing a society based on the principles of liberty, fraternity, and equality. This has to be for every individual and that social justice can be delivered to the members of the society only if the society is based equality, liberty and fraternity. However one can argue that this can happen only when there is fraternity in society. In this context let us see what Ambedkar says. According to him, "ideal would be a society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity...What objection can there be to fraternity? I cannot imagine any. An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to another part. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points and contacts with other modes and associations. In other word there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primary mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards followers. Few object to liberty in the sense of a right to

free movement, in the and a right to property, tools and materials as being necessary for earning a living to keep the body in due state of health. Why not allow liberty to benefit by an effective and complete use of a person's power? However, the problem is that people who support liberty in the sense of right to life, limb and property would not readily consent to liberty if it involves the liberty to choose one's profession. Ambedkar argues that to object to the liberty to choose a profession is to perpetuate slavery. For slavery does not only merely mean a legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept other occupations which control their conduct. This condition is found even where there is no slavery in the legal sense. For instance it is found in the society where caste system is prevalent because some persons are compelled to carry on certain prescribed calling which are not of their choice. Any objection to Equality. The objection to equality may be found and one may have to admit that all men are equal. Equality may be a fiction but nonetheless accept it as the governing principle.

A man's power is dependent upon 1) physical heredity 2) social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage, and finally, 3) on his own efforts. In all these three aspects men are undoubtedly unequal. But the question is, shall we treat them as unequal because they are unequal? From the stand point of the individualistic it may be just to treat men unequally so far there efforts are unequal. It may be desirable to give as much as incentives as possible to the full development of every one's powers. but what would happen if men were treated unequally as they are, in the first two respects, it is obvious that those individuals also in whose favor there is birth, education, family name, power connection and inherited wealth would be selected in the race but selection under such circumstances would not be a selection of the of the able. It would be the selection of the privileged. The reason therefore, which forces that in the third respect we should treat men equally demands that in the first two respect we should treat men as equally as possible. On the other hand it can be urged that if it is good for the social body to get the most out of its members, it can get most out of them only by making them equal as far as possible at the very start of the race. That is one reason why we cannot escape equality. There is second reason for accepting equality. A statesman is concerned with vast majority of people. He has neither the time nor the knowledge to draw fine distinctions and to treat each equally i.e. according to need or according to capacity. However desirable or reasonable and equitable treatment of men may be, humanity is not capable of assortment and classification. The statesmen, therefore, must follow some rough and ready rule and that ready and rough rule is to treat all men alike and not because they are alike but because classification and assortment is impossible. The doctrine of equality is glaringly fallacious but taking all in all it is the only way a statesmen can

proceed in politics which is a severely practicable affair and which demands a severely practical test” (Ambedkar 1979: 57-58)

After India’s political independence for dispensing social justice in the wake of emerging democracy in a hierarchically arranged society, Ambedkar discussed the operationalization of principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, which were considered to be cardinal principles of any democracy. He argued, “We must... not... be content with mere political democracy. We must make sure our political democracy a social democracy as well” (Ambedkar 1994: 1216). Ambedkar went on to define social democracy as well. In his own words, “What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items of trinity” (Ambedkar 1994: 1216). Another significant contribution of Ambedkar in the process of establishment of social democracy is his explanation of nature of three cardinal principles of democracy i.e. liberty, quality, and fraternity. He opined, “They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. (Ambedkar 1994: 1216).

Finally he cautioned the Indians how to eradicate the conditions of persisting inequality and emerging equality with the dispensation of social justice. In his own words, “On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social economic life we will have inequality. In Politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to live this life of contradiction? How long shell we continue to live this life of contradictions? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy, which...”The second thing we are wanting in is recognition of the principle of fraternity. What does fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of Indians-If Indians being one people. It is the principle, which gives unity and solidarity to social life. It is difficult thing to achieve” (Ambedkar 1994: 1216-17)

Although initially Ambedkar was skeptical of delivery of justice through government machinery but later on he preferred the same by having the share of Dalits in it. Going by the then existing Hindu social order Expressing his anguish on the failure of delivery of justice Ambedkar had opined “It might have been brought that the principle of equal justice would strike a death blow to the established order. As a matter of fact, far from

suffering any damage the established order has continued to operate in spite of it. It might be asked why the principle of equal justice has failed to have its effect. The answer to this is simple. To enunciate the principle of justice is one thing. To make it effective is another thing. Whether the principle of equal justice is effective or not must necessarily depend upon the nature and character of the civil services who must be left to administer the principle. If the civil services is by reason of its class bias is the friend of the established order and the enemy of the new order, the new order can never come into being. That a civil services in tune with the new order was essential for the success of the new order was recognized by Karl Marx in 1871 in the formation of Paris commune and adopted by Lenin in the constitution of Soviet communism. Fortunately, the British Government never cared about the personnel of the Civil Services. Indeed it opened the gates of the administration to those classes who believed in the old established order of the Hindus in which the principle of equality had no place. As a result of this fact, India has been ruled by the British but administered by the Hindus” (Ambedkar 1989: 104). However, as the time passed by Ambedkar gradually became aware that the Social Justice can be delivered through the government machinery and through constitutional means and therefore Dalits have to be part of it. In this context he wrote, “The power to administer law is not less important than the power to make laws. And the spirit of the legislators may easily be violated if not nullified by the machinery of the administrators this is not the only reason why the depressed classes should show special concern for securing power of control over administration. Often times under pressure of work or under difficulties of circumstances one has to leave good deal of discretionary power in the hands of the heads of the administrative departments. The welfare of the people must greatly depend on how impartially this discretionary power is exercised in a country like India where the public service is exclusively manned by people of one community; there is a great danger of this vast discretionary power being used for the personal aggrandizement of a class. The best antidote against it is to insist on a proper admixture of caste and creeds including the depressed classes and there will be no difficulty in guaranteeing this safeguard to us by a clause in the Constitution. Such protection you could have dispensed with if there was any chance of the depressed classes being represented in the future cabinets of the country. But there is not the remotest chance of this in view of the fact that the depressed classes will always remain in minority. This makes it all the more necessary why you should insist upon such a guarantee” (Ambedkar, 1989:265).

Moreover Ambedkar had cautioned people that, “If we wish do maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional method for

achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us” (Ambedkar 1994: 1215).

He was also for the freedom of the individual as well. Furthermore, even for the healthy future of the emerging Indian democracy he wanted to strengthened social and economic equality along with political one. According to Ambedkar one of the way to deliver social justice to the individual was breaking the monopoly of the upper strata. Ambedkar in this regard opined, “...there can be no gainsaying that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few. This monopoly has not merely deprived them of their chance of betterment; it has sapped them of what may be called the significance of life. These down-trodden classes are tired of being governed. They are impatient to govern themselves. This urge of self-realization in the down-trodden classes must not be allowed into a class struggle or class war. It would lead to a division of the House. That would a day of disaster. This can only be done by the establishment of equality and fraternity in all sphere of life. People are fast changing...They are getting tired of government by the people. They are prepared to have Government for the people...If (Ambedkar 1994: 1218).

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the paper has discussed some themes of social justice and in this light, it also discusses Ambedkar’s theory of social justice. Accordingly social justice has been defined in the paper as a principle that lays down the foundation of a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity. Although Plato and Rawls have not defined social justice in these specific terms, yet these aforesaid principles can be inferred from their writings on social justice. Once this proposition about social justice is accepted it was easy to infer from Ambedkar’s writings and speeches published posthumously, that equality, liberty, and fraternity are the basic principles of his theory as well. To begin with Ambedkar argues that for establishment of a society where individual is an end in himself and the aim and objective of society is the growth of the individual and development of his personality. He expected that there should be multiple channels and conjoint communicated experience. Further for Ambedkar Equality, liberty and fraternity cannot be divorced from each other. He had argued that, without equality liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. Moreover, Ambedkar had envisaged that social justice could be brought when political democracy is extended in social and economic field as well. This has to be done through constitutional means and by breaking the

monopoly of the erstwhile political and social elites. That is why he wanted that the Dalits and other marginalized sections of the society should join the administration. Ambedkar was aware of the existing corruption and biases in the Indian administration and judiciary. For him incorporation of aspiration of the marginalized categories in the rules and policy is not enough for dispensing social justice but incorporation of the individuals is also a must condition for dispensing justice.

Hence Ambedkar's theory of social justice becomes akin to Plato and John Rawls's theory of social justice. Further, with the help of Beteille's analysis of distributive justice which includes distribution of benefits equally to every member of society, equality before law, equal protection of laws and equality of opportunity reflect upon the other elements of Ambedkar's theory of social justice. In this context we can observe that Ambedkar had already enshrined these values in the Constitution of India. The value of equality in the preamble of the Indian Constitution is not only a slogan. Rather it has been substantiated with equality of opportunity (Article 16) and equality of condition that is reservation (Articles 330, 332, 335 and 46). This was done specifically because he might have thought that in a hierarchical society, like India, equality of opportunity may in turn produce inequality and subordination.

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