



AMBEDKAR'S REJECTION OF MARX: STRATEGY OR IDEOLOGY

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Abstract

Ambedkar is more misunderstood than Marks. It is aimed to understand the position of Ambedkar with reference Marx and his philosophy. Ambedkar being a democrat took opposite stand to Marx and questioned his methodology of transformation of the society known as scientific socialism and popularly it is Marxism. This paper without going into defining Marxism, it focusses more on Ambedkar's views on Marx. It tries to find out the reason for Ambedkar's rejection of Marxism.

Key Words: *Ambedkar, Caste, Dalit, Marx.*

Rejection of Marx: a strategy of Ambedkar

There is day-to-day systemic exploitation faced by Dalits in every step of their life. Hence there is a possibility of social transformation of Indian society if the struggle for equality and dignity is led by awakened Dalit leadership.¹ Ambedkarism or we may call it Dalitism² is a form of thought like Marxism. Dalit is a historical identity same as an identity of any other social group or community. Dalit identity is employed in the construction of social narrative against caste exploitation and social injustice whereas in the class narrative against exploitation of one class by another, the identities like capitalists and proletariat are employed which are in Indian society, practically subsumed by visible caste.

There is a philosophical difference between Ambedkar and Karl Max. Ambedkar model of emancipation is entirely different from Marx model of emancipation. Ambedkar model is born out of his experience and observation of the history of Indian society. Marx model is born out of his experience and observation of the history of Western European society. Marx believed that the Western European society has reached the present stage of capitalist society after going through the stages of primitive communism, slavery, agriculture, feudalism. After the present stage of capitalism, the West European society would reach the final stage called communism in which there would be no individual property; hence there would be a classless society. Marx analysed society based on the production system and relationship within the production system that is a production relationship between people. Marx analysis of mid-19th century European Society can't be applied to Indian Society on many counts.

Ambedkar stands for the struggle against caste discrimination and Marx stands for the struggle against class discrimination. Caste is an ascriptive category in which the social status of a person is ascribed based on his/her birth. Birth of a person in a rich or poor family is beyond one's own choice. However, in the caste system, social stratification is made based on birth to designate some social groups as lower than others. Caste is a production of a tradition that aims to dehumanise the vast majority of people in India. It is a phenomenon since the ancient period. Class in industrial society is a product of capitalism. It is a modern phenomenon. The class division aims to create free labour for the capitalist market. Caste tradition and class modernity are two entirely different ideas of social stratification of society. Caste is rooted in the religious tradition and class is rooted in the capitalist modernity. To fructify class differences into the class struggle, society needs to have strong class divisions, in Marxist terms- haves and have-nots; capitalists and working class. Society becomes class based only when it is transformed from an agricultural feudal traditional society into industrialized-capitalist-modern society. India is even



today non-industrial agricultural-based semi-feudal society. Hence Ambedkar viewed Indian society as a society of castes where caste subsumes class. In India class can't survive outside the caste. It could be said that India is a caste-class society.

Ambedkar contributed to the analysis of social stratification of Indian society and Marx contributed to the analysis of social stratification of society in general, West European Society in particular. Caste society is a birth-based identity and class society is economic status based identity. Religion and social law endorse caste while class is not endorsed by religion or law. There are about three thousand castes in India. Marx finds only two classes in society- Bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (working class). Locating about three thousand castes of Indian society within the broad categorization of two classes- capitalists and workers is ignoring the historical fact that India is a land of castes with class character. The class operates within the caste.

The capitalist class is the owner of means of production and the working class exchanges its labour with capitalists to get wages for survival. In the Marxist class category, there is no place for the middle class-urbanised, salaried, professional and educated class. Marx is of the view that the middle class will ultimately vanish. According to Marx, social stratification in society is mainly due to the class division of people. This class division of society is called class structure. Hence class structure is the main basis of social stratification. Why there is a class division of society? Once a society becomes industrialized, the system of stratification of society will be based on capitalism, in which middle class consisting of professionals, small entrepreneurs and peasants will gradually vanish and there will be only two classes- the owner of the production and worker of production. Due to the conflict of the economic interests of these classes, class struggle is bound to occur in society. In the class struggle, the unity of working-class makes the working class eventually to become the winner; thus society becomes a communist society where the means of production is owned by working class and all people in the society becomes owner cum worker.

India is not a typical industrialised society like European Society. Even today India is largely an agrarian society. The agricultural economy is the backbone of the Indian economic system. Vast masses of India depend on the agricultural activities for their livelihood. India indeed is still a land of villages with the feudal system of social stratification, where landlord, agricultural workers and skilled craftsman as the main classes. Caste as value system backed by religion fortifies the feudal landlord, serf and craftsman relationship. Hence, caste identity plays a dominant role to determine the socio-economic relationship between land-owning caste/class and class of agricultural labourers and craftsman. Caste worked against working-class unity by dividing them into many castes. In this context, Ambedkar refutes Marx by arguing that caste is a system of not division of labour alone but the division of labourers also. In Ambedkar words, "Caste system is not merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers".³

Democracy, as a system of politics and an ideology of society, if not total, at least some extent has transformed India from a society of social inequality to the society of social equality. Since India is not an industrialized society, feudal footprints are still visible particularly in the villages where caste operates with force and violence. Since India is a semi-industrialized society, it has become somewhat a capitalist society. In India, democracy and capitalism worked as agents of both land-owning as well as working-class to create avenues for social mobility and reduced class friction between dominant classes and weaker sections. The class struggle needs not just the clash of mutual interests, it also needs strong hatred between classes and means of that hatred has to be violence. Ambedkar's strategy is neither class struggle nor believed in hatred between classes nor adopted violence as a method of struggle.



Ambedkar's constitutional methods and strong advocacy for democracy prevented Dalits and other working classes from joining the Marxist struggle. Particularly the policy of reservations in jobs and education created avenues for social and economic mobility among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes who largely constitute the working class of India. It may not be an exaggeration to state that Ambedkar's biggest contribution to Indian democracy is preventing Indian masses from joining Communists by offering the masses such a Constitution of India that upholds social equality and social justice and provides avenues in the form of affirmative action's like reservations in jobs and educational institutions for socio-economic mobility of working classes. It is not far from the fact of contemporary Indian history that no other leader could be matched with Ambedkar for convincing vast Indian masses with the constitutional method of appeal, even after death. Again it may not be an exaggeration to state that due to this one leader, Marx has become almost irrelevant to a larger section of the working class of Indian society, particularly SC/ST & OBC. Ambedkar used democracy and constitutional methods as a strategy to reject the appeal of Marx among Indian masses. While interacting with Jay Prakash Narayan, the socialist leader from Bihar, on 8 November 1951 Ambedkar clearly stated the reason for not aligning with the Communist Party, "for the plain reason that I don't believe in Communism".⁴

Ambedkar's ideological opposition to Marx

Ambedkar started writing on Marx as a part of understanding the Buddha. He wrote three major writings in the 1950s in which he located the Buddha in the Marxian trajectory and vice versa. The three writings that matter the most to understand Ambedkar's conception of Marx are 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion'; *The Buddha and his Dhamma*; and 'Buddha and Karl Marx'. In these writings in the context of refuting Marx, the crux of Ambedkar's argument is that though economic exploitation is a major matter of concern for poor and deprived sections of the society and certainly it needs to be contended against, there are other sources of exploitation which excludes underprivileged from acquiring self-respect, collective participation and dignified life. Deprivation of access to resources of empowerment is not merely to do with economic injustice, the source of economic exploitation lies in social segregation. Caste exploitation is a specific mode of exploitation that dominates every sphere of Indian life is more than economic and certainly social mode of exploitation.

Ambedkar understood Marx through the Buddha and found both agreements and disagreements between Buddhism and Marxism. He found agreement in the Marxist views that "The task of Philosophy is to transform the world; there is a conflict between class and class; private ownership of property begets sorrow and exploitation and good society requires that private property be collectivized."⁵ However, Ambedkar "rejected the inevitability of socialism; the economic interpretation of history; the thesis on the pauperization of the proletariat; the dictatorship of the proletariat; withering away of the state, and the strategy of violence as a means to seize power."⁶

The agreements Ambedkar found between the Buddha and Marx are theoretical and ideal but not practically available destinations for the exploited masses. Let us examine the agreements one by one how practically they can't be applied particularly to Indian society, especially about Dalits.

Agreement 1: 'The task of philosophy is to transform the world'. The Question is which philosophy potentially transforms the world? As far as Dalits are concerned the more pertinent question is which philosophy has the potential to bring social transformation in Indian society. In other words, which philosophy is capable of transforming caste society into a society based on the principles of equality and justice? Though Ambedkar agreed in principle that the object of philosophy is to transform the world, he



was not in agreement with Marxist philosophy that it could transform the world in general and Indian society in particular. Ambedkar believed that not the philosophy of Marx but the philosophy of the Buddha has the potential to transform the world from the society of social inequality and injustice to society of equality and justice.

Agreement 2: 'There is a conflict between class and class'. Ambedkar though agreed that there is a natural conflict between the classes due to the clash of their mutual interest, but he differed from Marx in the context of conflict of classes in a caste-based society. Ambedkar holds "a Caste is an Enclosed Class."⁷ Class and caste are next-door neighbours as a class becomes caste. In Ambedkar words, "class is the father of the institution of caste".⁸ Without classes, there is no society at any point in human history. There might have been the domination of one group over other, as the early humans competed with each other for their survival even for hunting and gathering. Ambedkar says, "To say that individuals make up society is trivial; society is always composed of classes. It may be an exaggeration to assert the theory of class conflict, but the existence of definite classes in a society is a fact. Their basis may differ. They may be economic or intellectual or social but an individual in a society is always a member of a class."⁹

This is a universal fact and Indian society in earlier times could not have been an exception to this rule. Then the question is how class-based Indian society became a caste-based society? Ambedkar finds that custom of socially enclosed life that is the practice of endogamy first by Brahmin class and later the same imitated by others created the caste system. Hence, Ambedkar concludes that Brahmins were the originators of this 'unnatural institution' called caste.¹⁰ Since India has become a society of castes from the society of classes, every caste is an enclosed class. Brahmin class of early India had become a Brahmin caste. Hence Brahmin caste is an enclosed class.

Every caste has a class character because classes have become castes through imitation and ex-communication. Hence India is a society of caste-class in other words class within the caste. There could be a class conflict due to conflict of economic interests between two classes that is to say the conflict between capitalists and working class. In a caste society like India there are about three thousand castes, even if we broadly divide them based on class character, there will be at least six caste-classes. Theoretically, Adivasi, Dalit, and Shudra could be categorized as working caste-classes and Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya could be categorized as capitalist caste-classes but in reality, this is not the case. Since every caste is an enclosed class, there cannot be unity among the caste-classes. Hence, though Ambedkar agreed with Marx's perception of class conflict in general, disagreed in the context of Indian caste-class society.

Agreement no. 3: 'Private ownership of property begets sorrow and exploitation and good society requires that private property be collectivized.' Ambedkar though agreed to the need for collective ownership of private property, he argues that Marxism is not the answer to create that collective ownership of private property. Such an ideal society, in other words, Communist society can give equality but at the cost of ideals of fraternity and liberty. Marx aimed to establish a society with equality of all but without freedom. Ambedkar wanted not a society only with equality. He wanted to transform Indian society into a society of equality, fraternity and liberty. He believed that only Buddhism could give all three. Ambedkar says, "It seems that the three can co-exist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all."¹¹



Conclusion

Marx anticipated the dissolution of caste same on the lines of his belief that vanishing of the middle class. Neither caste is dissolved nor did middle class vanish. He felt that the system of caste could come to end as a result of the introduction of new technology in the manufacturing sector particularly textiles and in agriculture by the government of British India. It is true to some extent that caste-class relations were weakened due to the introduction of railways and new technology in textiles. But new technology couldn't make much progress in modernizing agriculture and caste-class relations remained more or less the same particular in the countryside.

Caste as a social tradition with economic purpose rooted in religious belief is a cocktail of multiple sources of power that created a system social hierarchy with social divisions based on unequal social relations of production and almost nil avenues for social mobility. India is an agricultural-based economy. Majority of Dalits are agricultural labourers who constitute a major working class in the rural economy. Dalits have two kinds of relationship with owners of production. One is an economic relationship and another is a social relationship. The ability of Marxism solely lies in finding material relations between owners of produce and workers of produce. In an agricultural economy, the Dalits are workers of production and the non-Dalits are owners of production. Marxism could explain the economic relations between Dalits and non-Dalits based on material conditions. The ability of Ambedkarism (in other words Dalitism) can be seen in terms of finding the relation between the ideology (caste and religion) and material conditions (economic and political). This is the main reason why Ambedkar able to explain that Indian society is not merely a society of division of labour, it is also the division of labourers whereas Marx couldn't find this difference.

References

1. Awakened Dalit leadership means Dalit leadership ideologically trained in Ambedkar thoughts.
2. Ambedkar thoughts are Dalit centric, though they have universal appeal. Hence Ambedkarism or Ambedkar thoughts could be called Dalitism or Dalit thought. Though Ambedkar thoughts are central to Dalitism, it encompasses thoughts for social justice of different thinkers before and after Ambedkar. Dalitism has a dynamic character and provides space to social justice thinkers of different societies existed in human history. Hence universal principles like liberty, equality, fraternity and justice constitute the core of Dalitism.
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4. Mankar V., *Life and Greatest Humanitarian revolutionary movement of Dr B.R. Ambedkar: A chronology*, Blue world series, Nagpur, 2009, p. 609.
5. Rodrigues, valerian, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p.24.
6. Ibid. p.24
7. Ambedkar, B.R. 'Castes in Indian,' *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol.1, Govt. of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1989, P. 15.
8. Ibid, p. 15.
9. Ibid, p. 15.
10. Ibid, p. 15.
11. Ambedkar, B.R. 'Buddha or Karl Marx', *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, Govt. of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2008, p. 462.