

Critical Analysis of Political Philosophy of Dr B R Ambedkar

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Abstract

The political philosophy of Ambedkar may help in renegotiating the crisis of western political theory in particular and leading the struggles of the masses in general. One can see Ambedkar's association with the grand political streams such as liberal, radical or conservative through his writings. At same time he differentiates himself with these three dominant political traditions. Ambedkar's philosophy is essentially ethical and religious. For him, social precedes the political. Social morality is the central to his political philosophy. He is neither fierce individualist nor conservative communitarian. His conceptions of democracy internalises the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in its true spirit. Though there are many attempts but one may find difficulty in locating him in dominant political traditions. Often this may leads to misunderstanding of the essence of Ambedkar. Ambedkar's political thought demands new language to understand the complexity of his thought.

Introduction

Ambedkar has emerged as a major political philosopher with the rise of dalit movement in contemporary times. There are several attempts to understand Ambedkar and his philosophy. Confusion prevails among scholars due to the existence of diverse, and sometimes, contradictory theoretical assessment of Ambedkar. The social context of the scholars and their subjective positions play major role in the assessment of the thinker and very often the opinions of scholars evoke extreme reactions which either elevate or demean Ambedkar. Though he had a great influence on Indian politics from the nationalist movement onwards, till eighties, there has been not much academic debate on Ambedkar. The communities of knowledge and centres of power either ignored or deliberately marginalized him as a thinker and social scientist. Ambedkar is nowhere mentioned in the contemporary Indian

philosophy and the philosophical discourses of India. This exclusion of Ambedkar has to be understood with the implicit politics of the writers on Indian philosophy. Very interestingly, the masses /communities of under privileged of Indian society brings him into the forefront. It is not exaggeration to say that there is no major village in the country without the statue of Ambedkar. He is the most celebrated symbol of the contemporary times. Due to the masses/Dalit communities symbolic association with Ambedkar, political parties and academics ranging from conservatives to radicals, are forced to look at Ambedkar. The celebration of Ambedkar has the undercurrent of failure of Indian democratic State to reach the majority of this nation and the assertion of these ignored communities. In other words, Ambedkar's philosophy is a search towards the theories of social reconstruction of Indian society.

Crisis of Western Political Theory

Let us have a brief look at major philosophical traditions of politics before we proceed into the political philosophy of Ambedkar. Political philosophers sought to explore social phenomena and political behavior, (often in a historical context) as well as to clarify problematic concepts, evaluate existing institutions, and argue for social ideal. Political philosophy is about the critical reflection of politics and its practices. It is about the understanding of the governing principles of a society in a much more critical fashion. It tries to philosophize the values, principles, practices and institutions, which govern the society. Philosophers gave different interpretations about the meaning of public life and governing principles of good society. Morality of the society and the ways of functioning of institutions serve as source in deriving political theory. Socio-economic developments and the ensuing conflicts in society provide conditions for the emergence of new social and political theories. Political thought seems to spring from the political experience of both the thinker and his society. Political theory is nothing but the systematization of moral and political judgments of our activities.

Historically, Greek thought followed the Christian natural law. In the west, Christian natural law was undermined by the individualism of seventeenth century. Relationship between individual and god was replaced by the relationship between individual and individual as the foundation of social enquiry. This individualism becomes the basic characteristic of the subsequent liberal tradition. The idea of social initiative and social control surrendered to the idea of individual initiative and individual control. In

simple terms, new material conditions gave birth to new social relationships and new philosophy was evolved to afford a rational justification for the new world which had come into being. This new philosophy became known as liberalism. Liberalism acquired different flavors in different national cultures. The difficulties in liberal theory lie in its basic foundations of seventeenth century individualism and its quality of possessiveness. The possessive quality lies in the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities owing nothing to society. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as a part of a larger social whole, but as a proprietor of himself. The basic assumption of possessive individualism –that man is free and human by virtue of his sole proprietorship of his own person, and that human society is essentially a series of market relations, were deeply embedded in seventeenth century foundations. The inconsistency lies inherently in the market society itself. Market society automatically brings the class differentiations. The propertied class would like to hold power over the subordinate classes. Men no longer saw themselves fundamentally equal in an inevitable subjection to the determination of market. Alternatives emerged for the market system. Articulation of proletarian politics gave a serious blow to the liberal politics. There are altogether different assumptions about man and society. The community has replaced individual. Marxist theory aims at the radical change in society and its human relations. Human society has seen from the perspective of the class considers human being as primarily a producer. His relations are determined by his involvement in social production. Other than the Marxist notion there is a conservative political theory would like to see society from the point of view of community. Conservatism has reverence for tradition, religion and age old custom. Edmund Burke is the one of the examples for conservative tradition. Burke more than any thinker of eighteenth century approached the political tradition with a sense of religious reverence. The conservative view of politics is known as politics of tradition. The state in particular and society in general must operate with respect to traditions and customs. The rights of the groups are acknowledged in that particular society. Conservative perspective works within the limits of the given order accepting forms of political action within the structural framework of existing institutions. Conservative theory of politics is known as politics of imperfection. It finds limitations with human beings and believes that human beings will be unable to create a social order through their own spontaneous efforts. People are inherently greedy and selfish. To restrain them there is a need for a state. The power is state. State plays a central role in conservative thought. It is the backbone of social order and authority, the guarantor of

social hierarchy. As per the conservative views, the inherent imperfections of human nature make a strong state necessary. It is needed to control the anti-social impulses of the individual. As per the traditional conservative perspective, social order is not and can never be achieved spontaneously by the free play of individual activities as claimed by liberals and anarchists. Social order has to be maintained through the strong leadership of those who hold positions of political responsibility. It does not mean that state is the only agency which maintains social order. Conservatives stress the importance of tradition, custom and of network of longstanding groups and associations, all pre- requisites of social order.

In the late 1970s political scientist Fred R. Dallmayr reiterated the statement of Peter Laslett, “the great tradition of theoretical literature stretching from Hobbes to Bosanquet had been broken and that for the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead.”[1] The crisis in political philosophy may be understood with the changed socio- economic developments and the unrelatedness of intellectual to the politics. In twentieth century, western political philosophy is marked with its defense of liberal democracy and legacy of civil rights against totalitarian or repressive forces. The economic practices and scientific rationality of west got different meaning in the developing nations. In recent times, the culmination of western science and economics leading towards dominance over other parts of the world invites competition and confrontation at global level. This situation has compelled the west to rethink and reformulate its central premises of its philosophy, and its conception of ‘reason’. And at the same time, there is a need to critically understand what constitutes ‘subjectivity’ and its cognitive activity. This dilemma seems to be aptly captured by Fred Dallmayr, ‘In the domain of political thought, the contemporary dilemma can be phrased broadly in terms of the relationship between ‘contract’ and ‘community’.’[2] Society is of collectives and generates political community. Far from involving only the aspect of inter subjective or inter individual contracts, a revision or modification of individualism in the light of communal bonds necessitates a general reconsideration of man’s relation to the world and nature-a reconsideration that inevitably conjures up the peril of objectivism and naturalism. Contemporary political theory appears precariously lodged at the cross roads of liberal individualism and post individualist communalism.[3] Christian Bay elaborates this in his article ‘From Contract to Community’, he links up the major predicaments of post-industrial society with the basic assumptions and preferences of ‘individualistic contract liberalism’ as inaugurated by Hobbes and Locke and it manifested in different forms. He notes that, liberals have ‘persistently tended to cut the citizen off from the

person’, putting on their pedestal ‘a cripple of a man’ without a ‘moral or political nature’ and without ‘moorings in any real community’ [4]. However, the debates of political philosophy in later days tried to articulate from the point of community or individual in relation to community.

Ambedkar : Social Precedes Political

Ambedkar’s thought, as reflected in his writings and speeches has great importance in tracing the history and growth of social thought in India. It is necessary to understand the philosophy of Ambedkar which is the theoretical foundation for the Dalit movement. The core of political thinking of Ambedkar is contained in two of his statements- the rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of society, and a democratic form of government presupposes a democratic form of society. He considers democracy essentially as a form of society of a more associated living and a social conscience is the only safe guard of all rights. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationships, in terms of associated life among the people who form a society. For him, social relationships are the key to democracy. Ambedkar is a social democrat in spirit and practice. His special contribution to political thought lies in his linking up liberty, equality and fraternity to the concept of social democracy, which in turn, he relates to democracy as a form of government. He further reminds the limitations of social democracy in everyday functioning. As he categorically stated while addressing the constituent assembly (November 25, 1949), ‘Political democracy can not last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy’ which means, a way of life which recognize liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life.’ In this sense he defined democracy as a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of people are brought about without bloodshed. In most of the speeches and writings of Ambedkar, the central theme is social reformism. He often debated and confronted on the issue of precedence of social over political issues. Politics have to be necessarily connected to the social issues. The very foundations of democracy lie in associated living in society. On the issue of giving primacy to social over political, he differs with congress and socialists. This is well reflected in all his writings in general and his writings ‘Annihilation of caste’ and ‘What congress and Gandhi have done to untouchables’ in particular.

In contemporary times, once ‘caste’ got theoretically recognized and established as the Indian social reality, the established political and social

theories got new meanings. Ambedkar as a thinker got prominence because of his scholarly conceptualization of the institution of caste and its functioning in Indian society. He interpreted the Indian social world in order to change the lives of the Dalit masses who are the victims of caste system. The situation demands proper assessment of Ambedkar's political philosophy in relation to other prominent political streams of the time. Ambedkar is a real philosopher in the Marxian sense. He has interpreted the Indian social reality in order to change it.

In estimating Ambedkar's political philosophy, the study will consider the following questions: What is his conception of the human being and society? What are his conceptions of rights, freedom and justice that flow in both his thought and action? What are the cultural and historical roots of these conceptions in his thought? In what way does he connect democracy and social inequality? How does he resolve the question of individual and community? What kind of theory does he propose in bringing out the relationship between State and religion? How did he perceive the role of Dalit movement (Depressed class) in India's democratic future?

Political Philosophy of Ambedkar

Ambedkar is influenced by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three grand traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, conservative and radical. The unique feature about him is that he has transcended all these traditions. He was influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, the pragmatic American and the teacher of him. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman had considerable impact on his thought. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative thinker of British, though we can't brand Ambedkar as conservative. Ambedkar's notion of liberty comes close to T.H. Green.

Ambedkar's philosophy is primarily ethical and religious. He thoroughly explored the Indian traditions and its philosophical systems in a unique way. He developed political concepts like democracy, justice, state and rights from his understanding of Indian society and the functioning of its institutions on the moral grounds. He is very critical of the institution of caste, which influences all the spheres of individual's life and the Indian society as a whole. He further discusses how individual is related to society and how individual's freedom is limited by other social forces. He is critical of authoritarian Hindu social order and argued in favor of democratic society. He probed into the moral and social foundations of India and gave new meaning to the lives of disadvantaged people. His was a rationale approach.

Reason plays a role in his writings and speeches. The methodology he used is very scientific rather speculative. He was influenced by the assumptions of modernity. He is well informed in many areas of Indian history, polity, culture, anthropology and philosophy. He quotes many thinkers in his writings those who are influenced him.

The notion of community is central to his thinking. To say that individuals make up society is trivial; society is always composed of classes. It may be exaggeration to assert the theory of class conflict, but the existence of definite classes in society is a fact... an individual in a society is always a member of a class. A caste is an enclosed class. Brahmins created caste and it is extended to other servile classes. Caste is endogamous unit and also a communal unit. His political theory was premised on moral community. It was as an ideal to be realised. He was very much critical about the Hindu social order. He argues that Hinduism is not qualified to be a community. Buddhism was projected as the ideal having the value of community grounding on morality. He considers that Buddhism attempted to found society on the basis of 'reason' and 'morality'.

His conception of community is very novel. He does not confirm to either Hindu ideal community or Marxist conception of community based on participation in production process. His conception of community is moral and ethical. It is not automatically available for participation in common affairs. His idea of community has to be created through hard and torturous process of moral transformation.

On Democracy

Ambedkar had a lengthy discussion on democratic form of government in his writings. His conception of democracy is different from the parliamentary democracy of Western Europe. Democracy came with the principles of liberalism. His conception of democracy makes different with parliamentary forms of in a significant way. Parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular government, a government of people, by the people and for the people. Ambedkar considered the problems and expressed discontent against the parliamentary democracy in the nations like Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain and some other European nations in proposing the parliamentary democracy in India. Ambedkar finds reasons for the failure of parliamentary democracy that 'parliamentary democracy gives no free hand to dictatorship and that is why it became a discredited institution in the countries like Italy, Spain and Germany which readily welcomed dictatorships'. [5] The nations that are opposing dictatorship and pledged to democracy too find their discontent with democracy. First, the parliamentary democracy began with equality of political rights in the form of equal

suffrage. There are very few countries having parliamentary democracy that have not adopted adult suffrage. It has progressed by expanding the notion of equality of political rights to equality of social and economic opportunity. It has recognized that corporations, which are anti-social in purpose, cannot hold state at bay. With all this, ‘the reason for discontent is due to the realization that it has failed to assure to the masses the right to liberty, property or the pursuit of happiness. The causes for this failure may be found either in wrong ideology or wrong organization or in both.’ [6] He elaborated this point by pointing out the fault with both wrong ideologies and the bad organization in carrying the ideals of democracy. The idea of freedom of contract is one of the responsible factors for parliamentary democracy in terms of ideology. Parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and didn’t care to examine the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract, in spite of the fact that they were unequal in bargaining power. It didn’t mind if the freedom of contract gave the strong opportunity to defraud the weak. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to economic wrongs of the poor, downtrodden and disinherited class.’ [7] The second wrong ideology which has vitiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy can not succeed where there is no social and economic democracy’ . [8] He illustrated this point by comparing the collapse of parliamentary democracy in the countries of Italy, Germany and Russia with England and USA. He felt that there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than existed in the former. ‘Social and economic democracy are the tissues and fiber of a political democracy. The tougher the tissue and the fiber, the greater the strength of the body.’ [9] Democracy is another name for equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and didn’t even strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result the liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and farce. More than the bad ideology, bad organization is responsible for failure of democracy. All political societies get divided into two classes-the rulers and the ruled. This is almost stratified that rulers are always drawn from ruling class and the class that is ruled never become the ruling class. This happens because generally people do not see that they govern themselves. They are content to establish a government and leave it to govern them. This explains why parliamentary democracy has never been a government of the people or by the people and why it has been in reality a government of hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class. It is this

vicious organization of political life which had made parliamentary democracy such a dismal failure.’[10]It is wrong to believe that democracy and self government is automatically became realities of life. In fact, the existing governing class is inconsistent with democracy and self-government and made all its efforts to retain its power to govern. Ambedkar felt that self government and democracy become real not when the constitution based on adult suffrage comes into existence but when the governing class loses its power to capture the power to govern. In some of the countries the servile classes may succeed in ousting the governing class from the seat of authority with just by adult suffrage. In some other countries the governing class may be so deeply entrenched that the servile classes will need other safeguards besides adult suffrage to achieve the same end[11].

Ambedkar accused the western writers that they are superficial and not provided the realistic view of democracy. They superficially touched the constitutional morality, adult suffrage and frequent elections as the be-all and end-all of democracy. Ambedkar proposed a written constitution for the effective democracy. The habits of constitutional morality may be essential for the maintenance of a constitutional form of government. He puts more emphasis on moral society and its custom than the written legal law in governing its people. He heavily invested on social morality for effective functioning of the democratic form of government. He reminds us very often, in devising the constitution one has to keep in mind that the principle aim of constitution must be to dislodge the governing class from its position and to prevent it from remaining as a governing class forever.[12]

Assessing the Political Thought of Ambedkar

About Ambedkar there are diverse opinions. Upper caste Nationalists has tried to brand him as a ‘British agent’. For instance, Arun Shourie, the Hindu nationalist and the “intellectual hero” of the upper castes at the time of the anti-Mandal agitation and the Minister for Disinvestment in one of the BJP-led government, puts all his efforts to depict him as an antinational collaborator with British imperialism in his book *Worshipping false Gods, Ambedkar and the Facts which have been Erased* (1997).[13] He charged that in the 1940s, Ambedkar never took part in any freedom movement. Instead, he was collaborating with the British. The motive of the Brahminical Hindu nationalists is quite clear. They want to prove that Ambedkar does not have any political credentials to be worshipped as a god of ‘social justice’. This attitude has to be understood in the wake of a strong Dalit movement and their confrontation with Hindu nationalism and caste hegemony. Ambedkar is the symbol and source of philosophy for Dalits in

pursuit of their struggles. In response to this, the upper caste Hindu nationalist thinker Arun Shourie, through his writings, consciously tried to neutralize the influence of Ambedkar in post-independent Indian politics in general and among Dalit masses in particular.

Naxalite party like CPI (M-L) Peoples War tries to place him as a liberal Bourgeoisie/ democrat.[14] Ranganayakamma, identified as a Marxian writer, argues in her book that neither Ambedkarism nor Buddhism has the real potential to liberate Dalits. Only Marxism has the capacity to liberate them totally.[15] Some would like to see him as a conservative, because of his leanings towards religion, Buddhism. However, there is an immediate emotional response to all the above remarks from the conscious Dalit scholars and masses. On the other side, Dalit parties like Bhahujan Samaj Party, or some Dalit scholars, argue that Ambedkar is the only radical thinker of the nation. For liberation of the Dalit masses, Ambedkar is the only solution. They took him to the level of a god. In this regard, Dalit scholar Anand Teltumbde comments, in making Ambedkar as a demigod, we are missing his essential message.’[16] One may encounter similar kind of problems in theorizing Ambedkar’s philosophy.

K.Raghavedra Rao, well-known political scientist made an attempt to caricature social, political and religious philosophy in Sahitya Academy produced a monograph, Babasaheb Ambedkar (1993)[17]. He characterized his political thought broadly as liberal. In the liberal tradition, he tries to find out Ambedkar’s version of liberalism to suit Indian context. He argues one may find in Ambedkar, a liberalism that has transformed into a version of neo-pluralism in the context of the new liberal theories of modernization and development. According to this, liberal state is conceptualized as a focal point for bargaining and relationship of exchange between associational groups of which a society is supposed to be made up. It is a shift from individualism towards group- based politics and collectivist goals. Raghavendra Rao identifies that Ambedkar seems to be more inclined towards a neo- pluralistic theory of state, and this is astonishing because he took this position as a liberal even before liberalism itself took a pluralistic turn, especially after the Second World War and under the impact of American capitalist ideology.[18]Further he argues however for Ambedkar this operational notion of state structurally geared to humanistic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. His ideal state was one, which all the three values converged under conditions of equilibrium. He is not a dogmatic in this venture. In Ambedkar’s version, a liberal democratic state is the political system that can best tackle this issue.’[19] Raghavendra Rao further explains how Ambedkar’s liberal democratic state came close to Marxian and

Weberian conceptions and how he differs from these conceptions. The liberal democratic state itself is not an isolated category and it requires an appropriate context of society, culture and religion to become a functioning reality. Ambedkar would argue that state is in fact a superstructure of a more fundamental structure- society. The economy, too, is a superstructure of this fundamental category. It means society is the base and primary, State and economy emerges out of it. He is in favour of normative society. Society rests itself on the foundations of normative order, which is religious order. To argue this way, of course, is to strike the liberal political theory itself at its roots’[20]. For Ambedkar, as for the Marxists, the State cannot operate independent of society in any significant extent. But while the Marxists foreground society strongly in the economy, Ambedkar evolved a theory of State with culture as its base. This may look like the Weberian notion but it is not. This is for the reason that Ambedkar attaches far greater importance to the economic structure of a society than a Weberian would. To that extent he is closer to Marx than to Weber. However, it has to be recognized that Ambedkar distances himself from both Marxian and Weberian positions in his political theory.’[21]

Gail Omvedt, well known scholar in social movements assesses his political thought in search of new vision for India. Her interpretations of Ambedkar’s ideas as enunciated in a memorial lecture, “Liberty, Equality, Community: Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar’s Vision of a New Social Order”[22], will be discussed here. Ambedkar, like Marx, is against exploitation, but not against development and accumulation. At a social level, he believes in progress in history, and at an individual level he gives legitimation to honest and energetic efforts of ‘householders’ to work and earn. While he doesn’t fit clearly into a historical materialist position, his writings show an evolutionary and ‘stagist’ view of history. This social evolutionary model differed from the more economically based versions offered by Marx or more conventional sociologists. History then, does show progress. What plays the basic role in determining social structure and conditioning human actions? This is the great question of sociological and historical materialism versus idealism (pluralism). Was Ambedkar an idealist because he gave so much importance to the role of religion and ideas in action?

Gail Omvedt finds difficulty in fixing him to a particular political and philosophical position. At the same time she makes an attempt to develop Ambedkar’s political thought. She notes that Ambedkar doesn’t spend any time developing or explicitly stating his methodology. She identifies different phases in Ambedkar and also tries to provide a comprehensive and

coherent thought of Ambedkar as a whole in the concrete situations of India. She observes that in his early essay on Russell, he projects the economic interpretation of history and at the other end of his life he seems to have moved towards idealism. He argued against the basic theses of Marx that the economic interpretation of history is the only explanation of history. In Buddha and his Dhamma, he gives clear priority to ‘mind’ as a determinant. He recognizes mind as the centre of everything. Mind precedes things, dominates them, creates them... Mind is the chief of all faculties... The first thing to attend to is the culture of the mind. His study of Indian past in religious terms can be seen in his ‘Revolution and Counter Revolution’. He reads the stages in history as Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Gail Omvedt characterizes Ambedkar’s view as pluralistic.’[23] She considers that Ambedkar has a significant sociological theory though he was not a trained sociologist or historian. Ambedkar does show a concern for a logical and a scientific method. Though he stresses ‘mind’ as primary in his final work, the orientation is very much towards the material world. Ambedkar’s philosophy of history is consistent with the pluralistic explanation of history, though not of a purely materialistic one. This would be a Weberian position. Even in his rejection of Marx, Ambedkar, who was never one to use words sloppily, rejects the ‘economic interpretation’ as the ‘only explanation.’ He never denies the role of material factors and economic impulses as a necessary part of any overall historical and social explanation.’[24] In spite of these shifting phases, there is no doubt that Ambedkar’s political-economic philosophy was a form of liberalism. He was an individualist and rationalist, returning always to the basic enlightenment values linked to Indian tradition.’[25]Further, Gail Omvedt elaborates the liberal position of Ambedkar in the light of many shades of liberalism. She considers Ambedkar as representing the ‘social liberalism’. According to this, the State will intervene in resolving the contradiction between inherited inequality and human rights. In this sense, it is different from classical and neo-liberalisms.

The Naxalite Party (CPI (M-L) (Peoples War) locates Ambedkar theoretically as a liberal bourgeoisie reformer’[26] in their document ‘Caste Problem in India: Our Point of View’ (Bharatdesamlo Kula Samasya- Mana Drukpadham). Further, it had a critical attitude in understanding or estimating Ambedkar’s philosophy and his politics. The Naxalite party considers Ambedkar as Anti-Marxist philosophically. Because of his leanings towards liberal bourgeoisie philosophy, he opposed the Marxist understanding that the social change through revolution and the development

through class struggle. He brings non-violent Buddhism parallel to Marxism, to counter the Marxian revolution through violence.’ [27] The Naxalite party finds problems in fixing his political position. It explains that though essentially Ambedkar is a representative of petty bourgeoisie, his life may be divided into two phases. The first phase is till 1941 and the second phase is after 1941. Till 1941, all his activities are pro-people and played an active role in consolidating and running the peoples’ movement. Initially the struggles are for social and civil rights and later it is for the democratic rights of peasants and labourers. He led the movements of anti-caste that are part of anti feudal struggles. In the latter phase, he served the British imperialists and Comprador bourgeoisie and feudal classes by involving in the Viceroy’s and Nehru’s cabinets and drafting committees, he helped forces of anti democratic forces of his times. He limited his struggles to reform and thus indirectly helped the undemocratic forces. The document is marking Ambedkar as an idealist. Philosophically, Ambedkar accepted idealism by rejecting materialism. This ultimately paved the way for him upholding Buddhism as an alternative to Hinduism. This idealism is reflected in the problem of Annihilation of Caste. Under the influence of idealism, he argues that caste came into existence from Hinduism, instead of explaining its origin from the ancient productive relations of India. As a result he believed that reforming Hinduism instead of changing the social system could annihilate caste. He has not realized that without attacking the social and economic foundations, caste could not be annihilated. The same idealism made him depend on the British political machinery in his struggles against caste hegemony. He thought that the British Government could be against caste Hindu ideology, since they belonged to the religion of western Christianity. He didn’t consider the British as imperialist. He didn’t recognize that the intention of British imperialists is to protect caste rather than waging struggles against caste. The Party believed that the liberal bourgeoisie thinking of Ambedkar lead him to a wrong conception of the nature and function of State. By believing the State as a neutral agent, he ignored the class character of the State. He created an illusion among the people that law and constitutional reforms could bring changes in the very nature of State. He is unable to find out the anti democratic attitude of the bourgeoisie dictatorship. In essence though, he got inspired from the bourgeoisie democratic revolutionary principles like equality, liberty and fraternity. He didn’t recognize imperialism and its class character. As a result, he was deeply involved in reformism in bringing out social change by depending on law, judiciary, Parliament and constitution. This justifies his position ideologically as a liberal bourgeoisie reformer.’ [28]

Dr. Anand Teltumbde, a Dalit scholar sympathetic to both the struggles of Dalits and Naxalites, considers Ambedkar as a radical thinker. In his monograph ‘Ambedkar’ In and for the Post-Ambedkar Dalit Movement[29] he points out that many students of the Dalit movement are influenced by the post-Ambedkar reflections in characterizing Ambedkar as a bourgeoisie liberal democrat...The folklore is that ‘Ambedkar’ needs to be replaced by the radical ‘Ambedkar’, who would inspire people to claim the whole world as theirs and not to beg for petty favours from robbers.’[30] He made an effort to highlight the radical image of Ambedkar from the very implications of his thought. He considers locating Ambedkar’s thought in liberal and Marxist traditions. One has to understand him in a social context he is operating rather fixing him in a particular position. He notes that Ambedkar in his first essay on caste, a Marxist orientation inspired by his supervisor Prof. Seligman is visible. In his later works, Ambedkar is more close to the liberal tradition than Marxism. However, consciously he never identified himself with liberalism. Being aware of its pitfalls, he needed to declare that he was not a liberal reformist, although while having reservations with the postulations of Marxism he could never hide his attraction towards him. The influence of liberalism on Ambedkar is more pronounced after he accepted the role of the chairman of drafting committee for the Indian constitution in collaboration with congress. Teltumbe explores Ambedkar’s thought in the light of failure of the liberal democratic State of India. He felt that liberal democracy might appear better than the decadent Hindu caste system but it is incapable of bringing any real change in favour of Dalits. It muffles the tension of the exploitative system and kills the revolutionary motivation of its victims.[31] Further, he argues that Ambedkar was misunderstood as a liberal because of upholding the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. In fact, he denies that he had adopted them from the French revolution. He said he had derived them from the teachings of Buddha. These principles were the clarion call of the French revolution but later became the ideological props of the liberal bourgeoisie in Europe. Since Marx had ridiculed these principles as the fantasy of bourgeoisie society, many people tended to stereotype Ambedkar as a petty- bourgeois liberal democrat. According to Ambedkar, the source of these principles is different from the French revolution. So Marx’s ridicules don’t apply to him and it is substantially different from that associated with the liberal bourgeoisie. For Anand Teltumbde the basis for projecting Ambedkar as a radical is that his philosophy of the annihilation of caste is in the direction of the goal of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar clearly understood that caste stood on multiple props in Indian society. That is, the religio-cultural relations,

feudal relations in the village setting of which land relations constituted the crux and the socio-political nexus with the State. Annihilation of caste thus needed destruction of all of them. He rightly diagnosed that caste system is basically sustained by the peculiar economic constitution of the Indian village of which the land relations was the main feature. This kind of understanding of Indian society is unique to him and no others had identified this in the politics of his times. The Reformists, the Congress, Territorial nationalists, Communists and the Muslim league who were active in the politics of his time had not bothered to think in this direction.

Further, Ambedkar realized the necessity of political power for the attack on caste system. Even to bring about residual change in the belief system either through the cultural or religious route, he stressed the necessity of political power. At the same time, in the given time, he was not prepared to confront the State. As an alternative he proposed, feudal relations in the village could be destroyed only if the private ownership of the land is abolished and co-operativisation of farming is introduced. He thought this structural change could be effected through the constitution.

It is clear that every one has his/her intentions and motives in attributing particular political positions to Ambedkar. Along with the Brahminical Hindu writers, the nationalist congress also calls him a British agent. With this, it is easy for them to exclude him from the pride of the nationalist movement. Naxalite party calls him a liberal democrat. Their intention is to show that he is not a radical thinker. As said earlier, they believe that the liberation of Dalits is only possible through a sound philosophy like Marxism-Leninism and Maoism.’[32] According to them, class politics can accommodate more political space than caste. In this country, through democratic means people could not achieve anything. Only through armed struggle, the Dalit masses can get real political power. The Naxalite party expects Dalits to be in their fold rather getting attracted towards existing Dalit political parties based on Ambedkar’s philosophy. The party considers only the liberal face of Ambedkar and it doesn’t want to see the radical implications of Ambedkar’s thought. It would like to consolidate its base by promising the most radical agenda in the context of a large number of Dalits leaning towards Dalit political parties centered around Ambedkar.

The action of Ambedkar embracing Buddhism is a complex act. This gives a chance for the Left-wingers to call him a conservative, since any identification with religion, in any form, is seen to be the opium of the

masses by them. In a completely different move, the Hindu political parties may get theoretical advantage by Ambedkar's advocating of religion. They conveniently forget that he proposed Buddhism in place of Hinduism. In fact, this action can be used against the radical spirit of Ambedkar's philosophy by groups like the BJP/Shivasena to portray Ambedkar as a conservative and appropriate his philosophy to their ends. They would also have the added advantage of keeping the Dalits away from other radical struggles.

Ambedkar: The Progressive Radical Thinker

Many thinkers and radical political parties made an attempt to project Ambedkar as a liberal thinker. Liberalism, as a political theory developed in the west has a theoretical basis and reflection of modern industrial capitalist society. It implies individual rights as natural and absolute. Ambedkar seems to reject the liberal notion of society as an aggregation of individuals related to each other as individuals in terms of the goal of promoting individual interest. He has given importance to justice than utility. According to him utility is only a secondary criterion for judging right or wrong. That is, primacy of justice over utility is axiomatic for him. By subordinating utility to justice in his philosophical analytical scheme, Ambedkar departs from the very first tenet of utilitarianism in particular and liberal philosophy in general.

Another question that can be raised is whether Ambedkar is an individualist in his social and political philosophy? Does he follow the liberal thought regarding this? The liberal thought maintains that essence of the individual is economic satisfaction, i.e. consumption. For the Marxists (radicals), individual is essentially a producer, and since production is essentially social, the individual evaporates in the realm of social. But for Ambedkar, individualism means transcending one's individuality through the exercise of one's capacity for moral responsibility. The locus of moral responsibility is the recognition of an objectively existing moral law or dharma. It is an ideal which Ambedkar considers central to his version of Buddhist religion.

Ambedkar's accepted many of the basic assumptions of Marxism. Its most important aspect is the identification of economic exploitation with private property. His understanding of Marxism was used in an attempt to formulate a historical theory of caste and social struggle in India. Ambedkar criticized Marxism on the basis of ethicality. He questioned the basic tenets of Marxism, that the 'end justifying the means' and 'religion as the opium of the masses'. Ambedkar considers that for both Buddha and Marx the end is

common but the only difference is the means that they professed. The means adopted by communists are violence and dictatorship of the proletariat whereas for Buddha, it is love and compassion, conversion of man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. Ambedkar considers Buddha as first revolutionary since he rejected caste system and social inequality and for his idea of Sangha. He comments on the issue of religion, that communists have carried the hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between two. Ambedkar also believes that humanity does only want economic values, but also wants spiritual values to be retained. Ambedkar tries to see the similarities between Buddhism and Marxism and also differences. Ambedkar argues that in India there is not only division of labour but also division of laborers exists. He also felt that economic interpretation of history is not the only the explanation of history. Buddhism for Ambedkar stands for reason. In fact, for both Buddha and Marx the ends remain same but the means differ. For Marx, the means are violent take over of the State through dictatorship of proletariat. For Buddha, it is conversion of man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. Ambedkar put the question to Marxists, what will takes place of state when it whether away. He expressed the doubt that the anarchic situation may take place. Ambedkar proposed Dhamma in place of it. However, Ambedkar developed his own version of socialism. He termed it as state socialism, which emerges from his interpretation of democracy. Ambedkar very much emphasized that caste is not only the division of labor but also division of laborers in India.

One has to understand the political philosophy of Ambedkar in the context of his life and struggles. For instance, in the initial stages he took the programme of temple entry. Later, he didn't consider Hinduism as having the potential for inclusion of Dalits. Also, he experimented with Marxists and organized joint agitational programmes of Marxists. After some time he formed an independent political party for Dalits. All these phases provide an understanding of the enormous dynamism of Ambedkar. It is wrong to consider him as 'liberal bourgeoisie' or 'social liberal'. All this criticism came from a universe alien to Ambedkar and the community for which he was fighting.

It is very difficult to fit him into dominant political traditions like liberalism, Marxism and conservatism. He himself finds difficulty in explaining his political position. It doesn't mean that there is no consistency in his political thinking. The problem lies only in explaining his thought in existing political vocabulary. He critically engaged with liberalism, Marxism and Gandhism.

He describes himself as a progressive radical and occasionally as a 'progressive conservative'. One thing is clear that he would like to be a progressive, and distinguish himself from liberals and communists depending on the case.

Conclusion

Though Ambedkar was nurtured in the liberal tradition, he makes a difference from it. On many issues, he differs from liberal thinkers like Nehru. While embracing Buddhist religion, he seems to be conservative, but it is clearly evidenced that he is not conservative by his attack of Gandhi and the Hindu social order. At certain points, he seems to be radical (Marxist). But, he throughout his life, he maintains his differences with Marxist thought, particularly in understanding Indian society. However, the primary concern for Ambedkar is liberation of Dalits, the people of the lower strata of Indian society. He approached any political tradition from this point only. This has implications in providing the principles of reconstruction of Indian society. In other words, one feels that Ambedkar's political thought demands a whole new language and the existing political language fails short in assessing or understanding his philosophy.

More over, Ambedkar's political philosophy has a great potential in mediating both liberal and communitarian traditions of the west. He connects the individual and community based on morality. He proposes the democratic, humanistic and rationalistic religion such as Buddhism is the source for morality and associate living. When Ambedkar criticises Hindu community for its oppressive nature, he does it with a standard of individual liberty and freedom. When he is talking about suffering of individual members of Dalit community he is projecting an ideal moral community based on equality, liberty and fraternity. So it is not correct to call Ambedkar as either a fierce individualist or as a strong communitarian.

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