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## Seeing Social Democracy And Labour Welfare From The Eyes Of Caste And Class : In A Special Reference To Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Thoughts

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### ABSTRACT

“It is as if we were forced to acknowledge the existence of castes, wishing at the same time they were classes” - Andre Battelle (Author of the book ‘Caste, Class and Power’)

This paper explores the idea of Caste and Class in the scenario of Indian Society. How identity and status of an individual is related to caste, how caste is hidden in class and class is hidden in caste. This caste system creates exclusion and inequalities. We couldn't differentiate caste from class and class from caste in India's context. When we talk about social democracy then the concept of Liberty Equality, Fraternity and respect of human dignity which are the basic pillars for the Annihilation of Caste and when we talk about economic democracy this leads to welfare of the working class. Political, Social and economic philosophies of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar provides us a broad area to discuss and analyse these issues in diverse perspectives. Dr. Ambedkar discussed these issues not only in theory but he also did enormous executive works in this regard. In this paper I will try to recognise Dr. Ambedkar was not only an Architect of Indian Constitution but also as a founder of modern India, founder of democratic India, advocate of social justice, human dignity and human rights.

He also must be regarded as an Architect of laws which are related to labour welfare, peasant welfare, women. In this paper I will try to explore the personality and works of Dr. Ambedkar influenced the different sections of the society in different ways. I also try to understand the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on the present scenario of Capitalism and Globalisation and what are the changes going on in the nature of caste and class in Indian Society.

“ The Community can't ride one track and business another. The two are inseparable, interactive and interdependent “ - Cleo F Craig, Former President and Board Chair. A T& T

**Key Words :** Social Democracy, Caste, Class, Labour Welfare, Economic Exclusion.

“The role played by Ambedkar has left its imprint on the social tapestry of the Country after independence, and shaped the political and civic contours of India today. It would have been a different India without him and in all probability, a much more inequitable and unjust one. He attempted to forge India's moral and social foundations anew and strove for a political order of constitutional democracy that is sensitive to the disadvantaged, inherited from the past or engendered by prevailing social relations “ - Prof. Valerian Rodrigues (Author of the books “The Essential Writings of B.R .Ambedkar ” and “ Ambedkar's Political Philosophy ”

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Social Democracy is a social phenomena to promote respect of human dignity and fraternity, social democracy is a mindset to mutual respect and understanding each other, social democracy is a way of living, way of talking, way of behaving to others, way of tolerating to strengthen the political and economic democracy. In a broad concept of democracy Annihilation of Caste, welfare of workers, establishment of dignity of labour and guarantees of human rights are inter-linked with each other.

As an untouchable, Ambedkar encountered social exclusion and segregation. Early in his life, he realised that a large section of his countrymen were denied their legitimate rights by the oppressive and dominant social customs and traditions. He believed that the establishment of a democratic society in India would be possible only when the untouchables and other weaker sections of society would be given an opportunity to enjoy basic human rights. (G.S. Lokhande, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar - A Study in Social Democracy (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1982), p. 156.

The word ‘Untouchable’ epitomised their ills and sufferings. Not only had untouchability arrested the growth of their personality but it came in the way of their material well being .It had also deprived them of certain civil rights. For instance, in the Konkan , the untouchables were prohibited from using the public road . If some high caste man happened to cross , he had to be out of the way and stand at such a distance that his caste shadow would not fall on the former. (Ibid., p. 102)

The link between democracy and human rights is captured in article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

“(t)he will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

Commission on Human Rights in 2000 recommend a series of important legislative, institutional and practical measures to consolidate democracy (resolution 2000/47, and in 2002, the Commission declared the following essential elements of democracy:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law
- The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations
- The separation of powers
- The independence of the judiciary
- Transparency and accountability in public administration
- Free, independent and pluralistic media.

According to Ronald Dworkin, “True democracy is not just statistical democracy, in which anything a majority or plurality wants is legitimate for that reason, but communal democracy, in which majority decision is legitimate only if it is a majority within a community of equals. That means not only that everyone must be allowed to participate in politics as an equal, through the vote and through Freedom of speech and protest, but that political decision must treat everyone with equal concern and respect, that each individual person must be guaranteed fundamental civil and Political rights no combination of other citizens can take away, no matter how numerous they are or how much they despise his or her race or morals or way of life. That view of what democracy means is at the heart of all the charters of human rights (Ronald Dworkin, A Bill of Rights for Britain- London: Chatto and Windus, 1990, 35-36)

According to John Dewey, “Democracy is much broader than a special form, a method of conducting government, of making laws and carrying on governmental administration by means of popular suffrage and elected officers. It is that of course. But it is something broader and deeper than that....”

According to V.P. Varma, “Democracy is a philosophy of reason, tolerance and compromise. It believes in the technics of argumentation, deliberation and conversion. It teaches the restraint of power. It accepts the neutralization of egoistic self-assertiveness. Any imposition of authoritarian dogmas or scriptural authority is anti-democratic.”

When we study the political thought of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar we found that all the above values of democracy exist in his thought of democracy. He is also regarded as the Architect of Indian Constitution. Ambedkar's major contribution to political thinking was to focus on the relevance of social democracy to political democracy. He believed that political progress would be impossible without a

reformed and enlightened society. He also argued that only achieving political democracy is not sufficient but it should be taken a step ahead to the social level. Thus the achievement of social democracy is way more important. According to him, "Political democracy cannot last unless there is at the base of it, a social democracy." Ambedkar also aware the people about this fact that, "Most people do not realise that society can practice tyranny and oppression against any individual in a far greater degree than a government can. The means and scope that are open to society for oppression are more extensive than those open to the government also they are more effective." There should be a real social democracy which is based on the three main principles that are... Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Ambedkar believed that there was a need for reformation in society as he was very well aware of the inequalities and discrimination that were prevailing in the society. He wanted to wipe off those distinctions from the society as he knew that it is clearly a hindrance in achieving a real democracy. Thus, he believed that with the achievement of political democracy, it is a must to achieve social democracy also. According to him, "Democracy is not a form of Government but a form of social organisation." Social democracy was the vision of DR. B.R. Ambedkar. He believed that without achieving social democracy there can be no real democracy. According to him, "If we want to build a democracy, we have to recognise the obstacles in our path because the grand palace of the Constitution stands on the foundation of people's allegiance in democracy." In this regard his last speech that was given by him in constituent Assembly is very important and relevant in present scenario also.... "On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950, [W]e must begin by acknowledging first that there is complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is 'equality'. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on privilege of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation of others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some with immense wealth as against many who are living in utter poverty.... in politics, we have equality and in social and economic life, we have inequality, We must remove these contradictions at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which is Assembly has to laboriously built up." (11 Ambedkar 's Writings and Speeches 184-87)

He defined democracy as a combination of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and respect of human dignity.

In his much referred to speech on 26 November 1949, Dr. Ambedkar said that India was wanting in its 'recognition of the principle of Fraternity. What does Fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians - of India being one people. 'After understanding the concept of social democracy we are going to understand the concept of Caste and how casteism is work as obstacle in the path of social democracy:

## **CASTE SYSTEM**

Here I want to discuss some definitions of caste which are given by some scholars. These definitions are taken from the research paper that was read by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar before the Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenwelder Columbia University, New York (America) on 9th May 1916 entitled “Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development...”

According to Sir H. Risley, “a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional, callings and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.”

Dr. Ketkar defines caste as “a social group having two characteristics: 1. membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born 2. the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group”,

In this way we may say that the Superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste.

As is well known, the caste system in India consists of mutually exclusive, endogamous, hereditary, occupation specific groups, in its ancient manifestation, the roughly 2500 year old Varna system, there were four broad groups: brahmins(priests), kshatriyas (warriors), vaishyas (traders), sudras (manual jobs). At some point in its evolution, the sudras split into two groups, giving rise to the group of the ati-sudras who did the most menial jobs. These were regarded below the line of ritual purity and were regarded untouchables (these individuals were considered too low to be assigned a varna, and were thus the avarnas, in contrast to savarnas. They were thus a part of the varna system by being outside its fold or by virtue of being excluded.)

### **Untouchables are subjected to deprivation, discrimination, oppression, violence and exclusion.**

According to Socialist thinker Ram Manohar Lohia, “The caste is the largest single cause of the present material and spiritual degeneration of the Country.” (Statement of Third National Conference of the Socialist Party, 1959, in Ram Manohar Lohia, The Caste System (Hyderabad: Nava Hind, 1964), p. 134.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar claims that caste is a harmful institution. The subjects of the Hindu caste system are not allowed to choose their occupation freely and by allowing no readjustment in occupation, caste becomes a direct cause of unemployment and underdevelopment.

In his Thoughts on Linguistic States (1955), Ambedkar defines the caste system as displaying the following essential features:

- a. Castes are so distributed that in any given area there is one caste which is major and there are other which are small and are subservient to the major caste owing to their comparative smallness and their economic dependence upon the major caste which owns most of the land in the village.



b. The caste system is marked not merely by inequality but is affected by the system of graded inequality. All Castes are not on a par. They are one above the other. There is a kind of ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt.

c. A caste has all the exclusiveness and pride which a nation has. It is therefore not improper to speak of [the] collection of castes as a collection of major and minor nations. (BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 167)

The caste system embodies different kinds of inequalities, going beyond the economic and extending to different forms of cultural and social inequality.

In the present scenario of Indian Society casteism still prevails, Kannada writer and International Booker prize, 2025 winner Banu Mushtaq (Heart Lamp) has said caste remains India's most brutal form of social control despite the constitutional guarantees and centuries of reformist voices. She said, "The hegemony of Caste is not just in village rituals and temple entry, It is in hiring practices, housing policies, university admissions and editorial rooms. It thrives not only through violence, but also through silence." (The Hindu Newspaper, 28/07/2025)

### **Relations Between Caste and Class:**

**"A CASTE IS AN ENCLOSED CLASS" - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

Caste is inextricably linked with occupation, and the hierarchy of caste corresponds to the hierarchy of occupations.

Casteism is a basic cause of social exclusion that causes poverty, unemployment, low income, poor health, poor democracy. The term 'social exclusion' means the process by which certain groups are unable to fully participate in the life of their communities.

Social exclusion robs people of their "confidence" and this loss adversely affects their capacity to function. According to Amartya Sen (2000) there are two features of social exclusion. The first is that exclusion is a relational concept referring to the lack of affinity between an individual and the wider community. Second, in defining the relation between social exclusion and poverty, there is a fundamental distinction to be made between exclusion being constitutively a part of deprivation and being instrumental in causing deprivation.

Ambedkar's diagnosis in *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) was the following:

Caste System is not only merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilised society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilised society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments. (BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 47).

Caste system also a graded hierarchy of labourers ascribed even before birth.

**Impacts of Casteism in Economy and Economic mobility:**

Labour being a part of production process, labour market discrimination obviously is a part of the exclusionary process of occupation.

At a theoretical level, labour market exclusion and discrimination would manifest in exclusion or complicit restriction on employment from one caste occupation to another and unfavourable inclusion, that is, access or entry to labour employment in another caste's occupation, but with unequal treatment in wage payment and other terms and conditions of work. Workers of discriminated groups, along with unequal working conditions governed by the caste related customary coercive norms and obligation (Thorat 2007).

Ambedkar, however, argued that efficiency and productivity of labour are adversely affected by number of other ways also, namely due to the nature of customary rules that regulate employment, wages, education, dignity of labour under the caste system. In his view efficiency of labour suffers severely in another manner also. The economic pursuit in caste system is not based on individual choice, the individual sentiment and preference. The principle of individual choice is violated in the caste system in so far as it appoints a task to an individual in advance, selected not on the basis of training or capacities, but on that of social status of parents. The social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and make one's career. This is nearly absent in the scheme of caste system. The caste system also puts a low value on 'physical' work, as compared to 'mental' work, with the result that the dignity of physical labour is nearly absent in the work ethics of caste system. Consequently, lack of dignity of labour adversely affects the incentive to work. Thus, in view of the standard mainstream theories of discrimination, judged by the standard criterion of economic efficiency, the caste system as an economic organisation lacks all those elements or assumptions, which are required to fulfill the conditions for optimum economic outcome. By restricting the mobility of labour across caste occupations and thereby not permitting readjustment of employment, caste becomes a direct cause of much of 'voluntary unemployment' among the high caste persons and 'involuntary unemployment' among the low-caste persons. The high-caste Hindu would generally prefer to be voluntarily unemployed for some time than to take up an occupation not assigned to his caste. On the other hand for the low caste untouchables the restrictions to take other caste occupation compel them to remain involuntarily un-employed. Insights from economic theories indicate that market discrimination is a typical case of market failure and brings huge economic inefficiency and adversely affects the prospects for economic growth and also involves unequal opportunities to discriminated group, all of which jointly create a situation of high deprivation and poverty, particularly among the low caste untouchables.

The Princeton University's and Indian Institute of Dalit Studies 'collaborative project team consisting of S.K. Thorat, Katherine Newman, Paul Attewell, A. Shwini Desphande, Surinder Jodkha and Madheswaran (Economic & Political Weekly, October 13, 2007) argued that there is serious evidence of continued discriminatory barriers in the formal, urban labour market even for highly qualified Dalits

and Muslims based on field level study. Thorat et.al. (2007) provides the results of a field experiment, which found that low caste and Muslim applicants, who are equally or better qualified than high caste applicants, are significantly less likely to pass through hiring screens among employers in the modern, formal sector in India. This type of field study gave clear empirical evidence, which exhibits the degree of discrimination against disadvantaged groups is very high in the private sector.

### **Ambedkar as an advocate of labour welfare:**

According to Dr. Ambedkar, a strike was the right to freedom of one's service on any terms that one wanted to obtain. If the popular government accepted that the right to freedom was a divine right, then he argued the right to strike was also a divine one. (Narendra Jadhav, Dr. Ambedkar's Economic Thought and Philosophy, p. 51).

According to Dr. Ambedkar workers faced two enemies, Brahminism and Capitalism. He said, I do not want to be misunderstood when I say that Brahminism is an enemy, which must be dealt with. By Brahminism, I do not mean the power, privileges and interests of the Brahmins as a community. That is not the sense in which I am using the word. By Brahminism, I mean the negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In that sense it is rampant in all classes and is not confined to the Brahmins alone though they have been the originators of it. (B.R. Am, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1, p. 165)

Labour welfare was one of the most important areas on which he concentrated his efforts throughout his life. In 1936, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party. His main intention for forming this new party was that, according to him, the Congress was not a party of poor people, but rather of wealthy businessmen, factory owners, landlords, and the Capitalist class. The poor and rich classes' purposes are not the same, and they can be diametrically opposed at times. If Congress had a monopoly in the Assembly, the nature of the laws could be beneficial to the rich and sometimes harmful to the poor. The establishment of the Independent Labor Party was required to protect the interests of the poor.

The Independent Labour Party was not supported and welcomed by Communists because they thought the struggle led by the party and Ambedkar would result in fragmenting the labour vote. Ambedkar argued that the Communist leaders were fighting for the rights of the workers but never for the human rights of Scheduled Caste workers. He cited an example that the textile mill unions had never raised their voices against the prohibitive barriers that kept Scheduled Caste workers away from the lucrative departments in the mills on account of untouchability. (Narendra Jadhav, Dr. Ambedkar's Economic Thought and Philosophy, p. 51-52)

Dr. Ambedkar joined as a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1942. He was tasked with managing the labour portfolio. His contribution to labour legislation in India was immense.



Dr. Ambedka, as the Labour Minister in New Delhi on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 1943, defined the labour demands for food, clothing, shelter, education, cultural amenities, and health resources in a very impressive speech.

In April 1944, he moved a bill proposing holidays with pay for industrial workers employed in perennial factories.

During his tenure as a labour member, he enacted legislation establishing a labour welfare fund. The money set aside as a welfare fund was to be used for the welfare of the labour and their families. For this, he proposed five labour funds for five different types of work. These include labour welfare funds for coalmines, iron industries, manganese ore industries, mica mines and beedi workers. Currently the government of India has implemented several new schemes for Indian workers such as PPF, bonuses, and allowances. All these schemes are the brainchild of Dr. Ambedkar. During the same time period, Dr. Ambedkar, while serving as a labour member, amended the Mine Maternity Benefit Act of 1941 twice and included pro-woman provisions for the betterment of the female workforce.

Dr. Ambedkar introduced a new bill in the legislative assembly in 1946. relating to the minimum wages to be paid to workers with respect to their working hours in the working premises. A provision was also made to revise these minimum wages every five years .

Under the Factories Act, he made provisions with amendments that provided workers with 10 days of paid leave from work for adults and 14 days for child workers. He was the one who made the provision for overtime pay. Under this, if a worker works more than 8 hours per day or more than 48 hours per week, he is entitled to overtime pay from his employer for the extra hours worked. Also the provision of maximum working hours per day and per week was also the brainchild of Dr. Ambedkar.

Women's empowerment has always been a concern and central idea in Dr. Ambedkar's work. According to him, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." He made an important contribution to elevating the status of women in India in terms of labour welfare. In this regard, he introduced the Mines Maternity Benefit Act of 1941 to provide benefits to pregnant women and allow them to get rest during childbirth and the early days of child care.

It is relevant to accept the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar for the development of labour in order to strengthen it. He always supports social and economic security for the working class.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Indian Society suffers from substantial inequalities in education, employment, and income based on caste and class. "Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against his slavery", this slogan of Dr. Ambedkar generated a consciousness in the untouchables and the downtrodden about their plight and the need to secure their human rights. The same type of statement is also given by Karl Marx while he elaborated his concept of class consciousness.

Dr. Ambedkar declared, 'Political power is the key to all social progress and the Scheduled Castes can achieve their salvation if they capture this power by organising themselves into a third party and holding the balance of power between the rival political parties'. (Moti Lal Nim (Compiled by), Thoughts on Dr. Ambedkar (Agra: Phoenix Publishing Age, 1971, p. 20-21).

This type of awareness is also found in ideology of Marxism when Marx explained six phases of social development in the phase of transition period that is dictatorship of proletariat class where state Mechanism and politics will be used as tool to abolish Capitalism and its supporting agents for salvation of proletariat class and finally to established Classless and Stateless society.

Dr. Ambedkar regarded Karl Marx as the father of modern Socialism or Communism. There are certain pre-requisites for Marxism to succeed. Marxism is a class oriented ideology which focused only on the economic bases that result exploitation of Workers and all the superstructures like, religion, education, Politics, are controlled through basic structure that is Economy. According to Ambedkar all the pre-requisites for success of Marxism on socio-economic ground of India are not present. We couldn't understand Indian Society in the framework of Marxism. In India Caste is ridden in Class and Class is ridden in Caste.

According to Gail Omvedt, Ambedkar ended up disagreeing with Communists regarding 'Class'. He was also disillusioned with the Marxian economic solutions. While he continued to see class struggle and Class oppression as important, he began to look for answers elsewhere. The values he asserted throughout his life were the classical social liberal values of the French Revolution. His study of Buddhism strengthened his feelings that it was Buddhism which had pioneered these values in India. In the conclusion to his essay on 'Buddha or Karl Marx' he states, "Society has been aiming to lay a new foundation as was summarised by the French Revolution in three words, fraternity, liberty and equality. The French Revolution was hailed because of this slogan. It failed to produce equality. We welcome the Russian Revolution because it aimed at equality. But it cannot be over emphasised that in producing equality, society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality will be of no value without fraternity or liberty. The absence of these factors in the caste-ridden Indian Society could not foster the growth of Marxism in India, and that is why Marx failed in Hindu India. Marx could not properly evaluate the importance of caste or its influence on Indian masses. Because Marx failed here, his followers in India talk of 'Class' and not of 'Caste'. It seems that the liberty, equality and fraternity can coexist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all." (B.R Ambedkar, 'India and the Pre-requisites of Communism' Writings and Speeches, Vol.-3, p. 462.)

In this way we can say that thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has many dimensions it includes political, social, economic, religious, untouchables, workers, peasant etc. Without understanding thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar we can't understand India and by implementing ideas of Ambedkar we will make a democratic society, modern society, scientific society, welfare state and a just society and established human dignity and human rights.

“...I should have expected some provision whereby it would have been possible for the state to make economic, social and political justice a reality and I should have from that point of view expected the resolution to state in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country, that there would be nationalisation of industry and land, I do not understand how it could be possible for any future government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically unless its economy is a socialist economy.” - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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