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**COMPARING DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S STATE SOCIALISM FOR INDIAN SOCIETY
WITH SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM OF KARL MARX**

History subject

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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) both were concerned with exploited humanity of Depressed Classes in India and the Proletariat class in European countries respectively. However, their perception of the society, their experience with society, their ideology of emancipation of the suffering masses and ways and means to attain the objective were different.

The paper has focused on the relevance of the State Socialism in India by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar through constitutional provisions and drawbacks of Scientific Socialism of Karl Marx. The philosophy of Marx is very vast to understand and has many aspects to study but so far Indian social system is concerned it is irrelevant to some extent. The paper does not cover Marxian philosophical analysis in whole but only certain aspects which have been addressed in the Ambedkarian philosophy of State socialism.

The genesis of Socialism could be attributed to glaring economic inequalities caused by the 'Laissez faire' policy at the one hand and the indomitable urge of the people to eradicate it for the fullest enjoyment of liberty, equality and fraternity coined during the French Revolution at the other.¹ Socialism in its primary meaning, is a complete social system which differs from



capitalism not only in the absence of private ownership of the means of production but also in its basic structure and mode of functioning .By extension, socialism is also any movement under capitalism which sets as its goal the attainment of socialism in the sense just indicated.² Originally and for many centuries communism referred not to an entire social system but rather to the pooling of property, usually only in consumption goods; by a group of people acting within a given social system.³

Capitalism and socialism are alike in that each guarantees to the individual wide latitude in the ownership and disposal of the means of consumption. In this sense it can be said that both systems recognize the principle of private property. They differ, however, in their treatment of the means of production. Capitalism recognizes a relatively unrestricted right of private ownership of the means of production, while socialism denies this right and reserves such ownership to public bodies.⁴

According to Karl Marx, “The history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggle.”⁵ There has been constant conflict of interests between the Haves and Haves not. In the modern age, those classes are known as Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. The Marx’s proposition can be relevant to other countries but can not be universal and not relevant for India as Indian society is caste society. In the beginning in Indian society there existed the flexible Varna system which later was developed into rigid castes system like a watertight compartment wherein once you have entered into it by the way of birth , you can not exit by any way by your merits or so on. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has termed this system of caste as a residential tower without any stair cases to go up and come down.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar expressed strong exception to that the problem of Depressed Classes is a social problem and not a political one.⁷ Therefore, he said, “self-respect is more important than the material gains. Our struggle is for honour, for self-respect not only for the economic progress.”⁸

The Indians always maintain their sense of purity of caste in their physique and mind like the blood circulation and accordingly the thought processes respectively that they can not get rid



off it as it is essentials for them in the society. These problems of Indian society were naturally unknown to Marx. Karl Marx might not have been familiar with the Indian history and Indian social structure. He hates the British bourgeoisie for their colonial rule in India, but ennoble the Brahmin who had wantonly created the caste based social structure for usurpation, exploitation and oppression of the so called lower castes.⁹

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar developed the theory of State Socialism in his book ‘States and Minorities’ originally prepared to be submitted to the Constituent Assembly in 1947. According to him, “State Socialism envisages to put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth.”¹⁰

The caste system apparently denies the liberty to choose one’s profession as the state can provide liberty for the same. “The individual is an end in himself and he has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the constitution”¹¹ Some objects if state does not intervene in the affairs of the private individuals then only there will remain liberty. But Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar alerts us that liberty without state intervention will be the weapon in the hands of the capitalists to enslave the poor.

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, “to limit not only the power of government to impose arbitrary restraints but also of the more powerful having the power to impose arbitrary restraints on the powerful by withdrawing from the control he has over the economic life of the people”¹² Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar gives the solution to avoid the exploitation of one class by another followed by the ways that the key industries or the declared key industries shall be owned and run by the state and others shall be run by the state or by corporation established by the state. The Insurance, agriculture shall have the monopoly of the state. The State shall acquire the subsisting rights in such industries; insurance and agricultural lands held by private owners. The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that “there shall be no landlord, no tenant and no landless labourers.”¹³ The progress of the



Independent Labour Party founded by him in 1936 incorporated ‘The Principle of State management and State ownership of industry wherever it may become necessary in the interest of the people’.¹⁴ The whole scheme of State Socialism of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar would be an inseparable part of the constitution.

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, “In our country the majority is communal majority. It may try to protect the caste interests rather than class interests. Probably, they may not tolerate that the poor and the weaker sections of the society would take the benefit of the plans.”¹⁵ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not want to exchange Parliamentary democracy for dictatorship for the success of State Socialism. He states, “The way out seems to be to retain Parliamentary democracy and to prescribe State Socialism by the law of the constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of the Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it. If only by this one can achieve the triple object namely to establish Socialism retain Parliamentary democracy and avoid dictatorship.”¹⁶

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar thought that, “Indian society is predominantly caste society. Castes are anti-national, anti- democratic and anti- humanity. Therefore, the caste structure of the society should be shaken from the root and bottom.” He has categorically said that, “unless you change your social order you can achieve little by way of progress. You can not mobilize the community either for defense or for offence. You can not build anything on foundation of caste. You can not build up a nation; you can not build up a morality. Anything you will build on the foundations of castes will crack and will never be a whole.”¹⁷

While suggesting remedy on the economic ills of Proletariat, Karl Marx said, “The Proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy.”¹⁸ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar also suggested the same solution for the ills of Depressed Classes. He said that “we can have one power and that is political power. This power we must win. Armed with this power we can protect the interests of our people.”¹⁹ The way of attaining the power, these both of them differ



from each other. Karl Marx states, “Their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social Conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist Revolution.”²⁰

So far Bolshevik Revolution in Russia concerned, Lenin could organize all the Proletarians under one banner. Whether it would be possible for any leader in India to unite all labourers under one organization? Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar observed, “I know in Bombay Presidency, The caste Hindu workers could work with Musalmans but not with heir Hindu counterpart untouchables.²¹ In India it is not only the division of labour but it is the division of labourers based on various castes.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has said in unequivocal terms that, “men will not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after revolution is achieved, they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed.”²² People in India think that it is irreligious to break the caste composition and caste rules otherwise they will not seek salvation.

Marx termed religion as opium. He states “Communism abolishes all religion and all morality.”²³ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar eventually embraced Buddhism based on rationalism, equality liberty and fraternity. As a Buddhist, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar believed in atheism as also Marx. But Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar believed in the way of life of Buddha but Marx did not believe in any religion. Religion is equally important force in shaping history. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, through his conversion movement could bring about a great change in the lives of Scheduled Castes. As Indian society is a caste society so also an Indian economy is caste economy. In India caste decided the profession and economic status of man. It may be true in European society that exploitation was the natural consequence of the Laissez-Faire policy, industrialization and capitalism. But in India exploitation is the result of Hindu religious system and it has been in existence since time immemorial. Marx in his Scientific Socialism predicted that capitalism would meet a fatal decay due to evolution taking place in the womb of capitalism itself giving rise to revolutionary Proletariat class. Hence Achille Loria says “Modern capitalist



industry thus originated in a terrible expropriation of the working population which transformed the independent peasants into an impoverished and hunger stricken mob. But historical nemesis awaits this society conceived in theft: and Marks predicts its disastrous end in the ominous words: ‘The knell of capitalist property will sound, the expropriators will be expropriated.’ ”²⁴ This prediction, however, failed in many non-socialist countries. Several laws for the welfare of the labourers have been passed by the states and it is obligatory on the part of industrialist to implement them. Hence, the capitalists are unable to exploit the masses to the extent they were doing previously. Therefore, according to well known political thinker Harold Laski, “The resources of publicity in modern civilization make impossible the private preparation of the gigantic effort assumed by the Marxian hypothesis.”²⁵

Marxist theory of Surplus Value is irrelevant today. According to Marx, the surplus value is appropriated by the capitalists. However, now a day the surplus value does not only in the hand of one but it is proportionately distributed amongst the proprietor, share holders or partners of the enterprise. The surplus value which they earn would be useful for making investment in augmenting the production and the opportunities of employment. The provisions taxes etc. will take out some portion from surplus value which otherwise would have gone to the capitalists. Karl Marx gave materialistic interpretation to history. Accordingly, the moving force in history was not ‘spirit’ or ‘idea’ but the relations in which men stood to each other in the process of production. According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, “Man, therefore, is the factor in the making of the history and that environmental force whether impersonal or social if they are the first are not the last things.”²⁶ Karl Marx advocates for imposing dictatorship of Proletariat. In the days of Marx suffrage was limited as such he had no faith in democratic institutions that they would change the existing social order. On the contrary, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had indomitable faith in democracy. He believed that any kind of dictatorship is unfair whether it is of Proletariat or capitalists. His idea seems to be very much relevant to the modern age. Today, democratic institutions are enlarged and empowered to take necessary steps for bringing about and



consolidation of change in society. , the Marxist idea of ‘Dictatorship of Proletariat’ seems to be irrelevant.

“Modern bourgeois society, rising out of the ruins of feudal society, did not make an end of class antagonisms. It merely set up new classes in place of the old; new conditions of oppression; new embodiments of struggle.”²⁷

“While in the Soviet Union , which is so far the only unquestionable example of socialism in practice, collective farmers who own their land and most of their means of production cooperatively are nevertheless permitted to own privately a certain amount of livestock and other necessities of agricultural production.”²⁸

The principle of Perestroika (Restructuring) and Glasnost (Openness) introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, the President of USSR, has amply proved that dictatorship has no place in modern age.²⁹ As of now there is a collapse of Communism in most of the communist countries.

Karl Marx believes that after attaining perfect state of Socialism the state will wither away. In his opinion, State is the instrument of exploitation of the proletarian; hence, it needs to be destroyed. According to Paul M Sweezy, “the withering away of the state does not imply the disappearance either of authority or administration. Engels, in refuting the theories of the anarchists, ridiculed the idea that a factory or railway or ship, to say nothing of a complex society, could be run without some ‘persons ‘being in authority over others.”³⁰

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar believed in state as an instrument of social change and social welfare. He does not favour anarchism. Thus it is difficult to imagine the existence of a civil society without state. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar seeks to establish a balance between state ownership and private enterprise, but communism wants complete state monopoly.³¹ According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, “democracy is a form and a method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought without bloodshed.”³²



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that the present or future generations would have ultimately to choose between the gospel of the Buddha and the Gospel of Karl Marx.³³ According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, “Marx’s philosophy was the satisfying philosophy to the lower order. It was a direction, not a dogma.” Once he described Russian Communism as a fraud. .”³⁴

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar State Socialism should be practiced through Parliamentary democracy by which one could achieve the triple object, namely, to establish Socialism, retain Parliamentary democracy and avoid dictatorship.”³⁵ He invited the attention of the Indian Socialists and observed that, “economic motive is not the only motive by which man is actuated. That economic power is the only kind of power no student of human society can accept. That religion is the source of power is amply illustrated by the history of this country.”³⁶

He questioned the socialists whether they could have economic reforms without first bringing about reform of the Social order. He warned them, “If they wish to make Socialism a definite reality, then they must recognize that the problem of social reform is fundamental and that for them there is no escape from it. Unless they do so, they can not achieve their revolution. They will be compelled to take account of caste after revolution if not before revolution.”³⁷

Referring to Karl Marx’s philosophy, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar observed, “Man can not live by bread alone. He has a mind and it drives him to activity. Hindu religion has watered down the enthusiasm of the down-trodden. And I found it necessary to change my faith and embrace Buddhism.”³⁸ “In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.”³⁹

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was an expert on Marxism as well as Buddhism. He was invited at the fourth Conference of the World Fellowship of the Buddhists in Kathmandu, Nepal on 20th November, 1956 and delivered the speech on the subject of ‘Buddhism and Communism’. In the



beginning he talked about philosophy of Marx such as exploitation, poverty, private property, surplus value, misappropriation, state, dictatorship of the Proletariat etc. Then he refuted it in following words, “So far as Marxism or Communism concerned, Buddhism has enough of it.....The communist ways and means to achieve the revolution are violent, unsure, momentary and result in killing of people wherein Buddhist ways are sure, by converting minds and are long lasting. The Russians have accepted the Communist system not voluntarily but they are obeying to it because they are afraid of being hanged.”⁴⁰ In this way Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar found the solution to the Indian Administrative system in the Buddhist Philosophy and not in Marxist Philosophy. While again citing the example of Russian Communist regime and said, “The Russians are proud of their Communism. But they forget that the wonder of all wonders is that the Buddha established Communism so far as the ‘Sangha’ was concerned without dictatorship which Lenin failed to do”⁴¹

Some may differ with the content of the paper as they might believe in the scientific socialism of Karl Marx and some may not agree with the state socialism of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and can have another ideology of which everyone is independent enough.

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