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In this issue.....

| Title & Author | Page No. |
|--|-----------------|
| भारत रत्न डा. भीमराव अम्बेडकर का दार्शनिक एवं शैक्षिक चिन्तन – राम भगत | 07-18 |
| अम्बेडकर का व्यक्तित्व और सामाजिक चिंतन – सुशीला | 19-26 |
| डॉ. बी. आर. अम्बेडकर द्वारा निर्मित भारतीय संविधान की ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमि— प्रकाश सिंह बडवाया | 27-37 |
| वनवासी संस्कृति के पारम्परिक ज्ञान : एक दार्शनिक अध्ययन – देवदास साकेत एवं सोनालिका साकेत | 38-43 |
| Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Approach to Nationalism and Liberation of Untouchables- Ram Juwari & Manoj Kumar | 44-50 |
| Role of Religions in Imparting Social Justice in Indian Socio-Political Context- Desh Raj Sirswal | 51-58 |
| RESULT OF ESSAY COMPETITION- 2015 | 60 |
| NEW PUBLICATIONS | 61 |
| RECENT ACTIVITIES | 62 |
| PHILOSOPHY NEWS IN INDIA | 64 |
| CONTRIBUTORS OF THIS ISSUE | 69 |

ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN IMPARTING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN INDIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Desh Raj Sirswal

Abstract

Religion is a deriving force for social change in India since ancient times. Although we boast about ancient Indian ideals of social stratification, which made a long lasting discrimination within society, and most of the times we do not do any justice to social-political life of a billion peoples. The study of the relation between religion and politics showed that this relation always made a problematic situation for the indigenous people and always benefitted invaders. The idea of the interface or mixing of religion and politics being problematic and potentially dangerous is a byproduct of the rise of secularism, often regarded as one of the hallmarks of modern society. The concept of social justice is an important concept for the social-political harmony in present times. Social justice denotes the equal treatment of all citizens without any social distinction based on caste, colour, race, religion, sex and so on. It means absence of privileges being extended to any particular section of the society, and improvement in the conditions of backward classes (SCs, STs, and OBCs) and women. Social justice is a public and collective good that involves an equitable sharing of the earth's power, resources and opportunities to enable people individually and collectively to develop their talents to the fullest. Its realisation requires social relations embedded in trust, acceptance, mutuality, reciprocity and solidarity. Under Indian Constitution the use of social justice is accepted in wider sense, which includes social and economical justice both. Ancient social structure allows us to see the discrimination made to indigenous people with reference to their socio-political life. These evils not only effects Hindu social order rather it also haunts the social structure of newly established religions in Indian continent. The objective of this paper is to disuses the role of religions in imparting social justice to Indian socio-political structure of our society. First we will see the place of religion in society then sees its effect on socio-political order whether it is affirmative or negative which allow us to make any rational conclusion.

Key-Words: Religion, Indian Society, Social Justice, Social Inclusion and Indian Constitution

Role of Religion: An Overview

Religion is a strong faith in some supernatural Spirit or God. Religion and reason cannot go together. The postulates of religious experience cannot be established by means of any investigation. They can be accepted as a matter of faith. Every religion has its own ideals. For example, Hinduism believes in *moksha*. Some say that where reason ends, there faith begins. This line purely applies on the religions of Indian continent. Indian society witnessed a huge social change and religious movements in Indian continent in various periods of history. Every religion has its basic ideology, slightly different from another religion but a major difference in its outer appearance or practices. We can say that, “Religion might be a powerful force in one society; less powerful in another and in some societies might have a negligible influence. The differential role of religion in different societies and epochs arguably does not eliminate in its entirety the influence of religion on identity development and evolution over time.” Every religion has its different political character, which may be different from their age-old ideals of life. (1) What role Religion played in Indian Society can be seen in these lines, “In India, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism are some of the major religions practised by the people. Numerically the Hindus are considered to be the majority, which inspires many Hindu loyalist groups like the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) or the Siva Sena and political parties like the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) or the Hindu Mahasabha to claim that India is a Hindu State. These claims generate homogenising myths about India and its history. These claims are countered by other religious groups who foresee the possibility of losing autonomy of practice of their religious and cultural life under such homogenising claims. This initiates contestations that have often resulted in communal riots. The generally accepted myths that process the identity divide on religious lines centre on the ‘appeasement theory’, ‘forcible religious conversions’, general ‘anti-Hindu’ and thus ‘anti-India’ attitude of the minority religious groups, the ‘hegemonic aspirations’ of majority groups and ‘denial of a socio-cultural space’ to minority groups.”(2) So, we can see that religious politics affected the socio-political structure of the society at large.

The concept of Hindu nationalism played a negative role since the freedom movement in India and till date, “A takeover of Indian politics by the right-wing of Hindu nationalism is the most plausible speculative scenario, which can trigger such a dark future. The extreme versions of Hindu nationalism are against the idea of India developed during the

freedom struggle, and also against the self-correcting equilibrium Indian politics has come to represent: an equilibrium provided by groups fighting for their rights and dignity, making vociferous claims and advancing through politics, but always stopping short of mutual annihilation and settling for some widely accepted principles of victory and defeat, namely the vote, elections and democracy. The ideologically pure Hindu nationalism has no commitment to democracy, only to an aggressive, muscular and orderly Hindu nation where minorities, especially the Muslims, would "behave" or be forced to "behave."⁽³⁾ This ideology directly effects social status of Dalits, Muslims and Christians and we saw several cases since the beginning of this century. Now a day same "ideological crisis" begins in another new established religions also. They are going so far from their religions ideals and trying for only political powers. So, it becomes very important to know that within this situation how we can talk about social justice where so much "theory-practice" difference occurred. This is the reality of our society that religion is a big threat to the concept of social justice in India.

Social Justice:

The concept of 'Social justice' in India is the product of social injustice prevailed in our socio-political system of our country. Caste system and social structure is the fountainhead for social injustice. It is unfortunate that even sixty years after independence social justice is still a distant dream not within the reach of the masses. "The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women under the traditional Hindu Caste hierarchy had suffered for centuries without education and opportunities for advancement in life. Social justice is compensatory justice to off set the accumulated disabilities suffered by these historically disadvantaged sections of society and absorb them educationally and occupationally in the mainstream of national life. If opportunities are not given to develop their neglected talents there will be social imbalance and tension resulting in anarchy and disobedience to the rule of law."⁽⁴⁾ Indian society is undergoing a sea change and there is a tremendous socioeconomic transformation-taking place within it, but it has also given rise to a kind of mechanism which discriminate its people on the basis of identity, accepts oppression and exploitation of certain sections of society. Hence, caste and caste based discrimination continues to be a reality. The doctrine of inequality is the core and heart of the caste system. Supported by philosophical elements, it constructs the moral, social and legal foundations of Hindu society.

The Supreme Court has explained the concept of social justice i.e. “the Constitution commands justice, liberty, equality and fraternity as supreme values to usher in the egalitarian social, economic and political democracy”. Social justice, equality and dignity of persons are corner stones of social democracy. The concept of “social justice” which the Constitution of India engrafted consists of diverse principles essential for the orderly growth and development personality of every citizen. Social justice is thus an integral part of justice in the generic sense. Justice is a genus of which social justice is one of its species. Social justice is a dynamic device to mitigate the suffering of the poor, weak, dalits, Tribes and deprived sections of the society.(5)

The questions, which are against the social justice:

- Liberation from Hunger
- Liberation from Poverty
- Liberation from Rioters
- Liberation from Sangh Ideology
- Liberation from Feudalism
- Liberation from Capitalism
- Liberation from Casteism
- Liberation from Communalism
- Liberation from Brahminism
- Liberation from Manu’s ideology (6)

We experienced the “root of social injustice” in our society has a root in social and political system. Here is the evidence, “Advancements in social justice, except in extraordinary situations and circumstances such as the gaining of political independence, the aftermath of a long war or the depths of an economic depression, require pressure from organized political forces. Brief and sporadic protests against injustices, even if vehement, usually have a limited effect. The problem is that few political regimes have institutions or processes to promote the orderly and effective expression of grievances and demands by those who are not benefiting or are hurt by existing economic and social arrangements. Political parties are often reduced to administrative machines focused on winning elections. Trade unions are declining in both number and influence. Democracy is seemingly gaining ground but is being vitiated by the “moneytization” of social

relations and social institutions at many levels. The concept of reform, so often invoked in recent years to facilitate economic deregulation and privatization, could be constructively applied by liberal democracies and other regimes inspired by liberal principles to identify the requirements of social justice and implement appropriate policies.”(7)

A report on Dalits of India states that - “IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Despite being charged with a constitutional mandate to promote social justice, various local institutions of the Indian State clearly tolerate and even facilitate the practice of untouchability: 37.8% of the villages: Dalits made to sit separately in government schools, 27.6% of the villages of Dalits: prevented from entering police stations, 25.7% of the villages of Dalits: prevented from entering ration shops, 33% of the villages: public health workers refuse to visit Dalit homes, 23.5% of the Dalit villages: don’t get mail delivered to their homes, 14.4% of the Dalit villages: Dalits not permitted to enter the “panchayat” local government building, 12% of the Dalit villages: Dalits denied access to or forced to form separate lines at polling booths, 48.4% of the Dalit villages: denied access to water sources. IN MARKET ACCESS: 35% of villages surveyed: Dalits barred from selling produce in local markets 47% of villages with milk cooperatives prevent Dalits from selling milk, and 25% prevent Dalits from buying milk, IN WORK: 25% of villages: Dalits paid lower wages than non-Dalits, work longer hours, have more delayed wages and suffer more verbal and physical abuse, 37% of villages: Dalit workers paid wages from a distance to avoid physical contact, IN RELIGION AND RITES: 64% of Dalits: restricted from entering Hindu temples Almost, 50% of villages: Dalits prevented from accessing cremation grounds, IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE: 73% of villages: Dalits not permitted to enter non-Dalit homes, 70% of villages: Dalits and non-Dalits cannot eat together, 35.8% of Dalits: denied entry into village shops”. (8)

Promoting Social justice: Community Empowerment

If want social justice established in every section of the society. Wee need community empowerment and it requires the development of social capital on the basis of:

- Capacity building
- Enhancing resilience
- Trust and empathy
- Respect and dignity for the person

- Reciprocity and mutuality
- Accountability
- Solidarity
- Collective action
- Power-sharing
- Resource finding and sharing
- Linking the personal to the structural (and the reverse)

The Indian constitution has certain important provisions to safeguard and promote the interests of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities. Not only this oppressed people of our age-old Hindu society and culture had to have some movements and fought against the inhuman and humiliating behaviour of the upper caste Hindus. The role played by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar for the upliftment of the marginalized section cannot be forgotten by Indian history. He has been regarded as one of the doyens devoted to seeking equality and justice in Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar can easily be characterized as a philosopher deeply rooted in the modernist ideologies. His philosophy was occupied with social amelioration, political enlightenment, spiritual awakening and economic well being of the masses. He had a deep faith in fundamental human rights, in the equal rights of man and women, in the dignity of individual, in socio and economic justice, in the promotion of social progress and better standard of life with peace and security in all spheres of human life. His study of social facts enriches his political philosophy. (9)

Dr B. R. Ambedkar left an indelible mark on Indian polity, society and economy with a broad range of scholarly work and rigorous political activism. While much is known, heard and written about his political, social and economic writings, there has been relatively less of an attempt at understanding the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical origins of his worldview. He was passionately critical of the Hindu caste system which is the basis of social, cultural, economic and political subjugation of those considered “lower castes”. In his struggle against caste based discrimination, Ambedkar held that emancipation of Dalits in India was possible only through the three-pronged approach of “education, agitation and organization”. His works are deeply embedded in a secular and modern understanding of human society. Moreover, they are also imbued with a strong sense of humanism and a belief in human dignity. His worldview was informed by not only a scholarly interest but a personal experience of discrimination and

marginalization. The deep sense of injustice felt by him motivated Dr. Ambedkar to challenge all oppressive institutions of society. The discourse of egalitarian Indian society is part of the large mission propounded and practiced by Dr. Ambedkar in his efforts to build Indian society imbued with the values of equality and social justice. Probably Dr. Ambedkar is the first person that seriously thought about social equality and inclusive Indian society as an essential feature for the emergence of a healthy nation-state and democracy. But most of his intellectual peers focused on economic, political and spiritual equality and ignored social inequalities. Due to this even after 65 years of independence caste based discrimination is applauded in society. However, vision of Dr. Ambedkar has been amplified through the discourse of egalitarian society based on the trinity of principles -- equality, liberty and fraternity.(10)

Conclusively, we can say that any religion cannot be effective in imparting social justice till it is dedicated towards proper implementation of their ideals in human behavior and make it a social reality. They must aware of present day problems of the society and work, think and mould their system accordingly. Otherwise this system will be a taboo for the society in coming years.

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