SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT FROM BELOW: AMBEDKAR’S VISION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

V.M. Ravi Kumar,
Assistant Professor, Department of History, B B Ambedkar University, Lucknow, Email: vmravikumar@gmail.com

N. K. S. More
Associate Professor, Department of Environmental Science, B B Ambedkar, University, Lucknow.

Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar has been a versatile personality who reflected and acted for shaping Modern India. He waged a lifelong crusade to criticise caste based inequalities and advanced several measures to create inclusive and egalitarian society in India. This paper attempts to capture his ideas on development of rural areas in India from the perspective of social justice. It has been proposed that in spite of his critique of rural areas, he proposed several innovative measures for development of rural areas and agriculture. These measures are highly relevant even today to develop rural areas within the framework of inclusive development.

Key Words: Ambedkar, Rural Development, Social Justice, Village, Development.

Introduction

The overwhelming academic and public discourse on Dr. Ambedkar revolves around his contribution to constitution making and positive discrimination of Dalits. The fact, however, is that Ambedkar is quintessential a modernist thinker possessing wide range of strategies for inclusive development of India. This paper explores the development vision of Ambedkar with regards to rural areas of India and various suggestions her offered. It is explicitly visible fact that he offered fascinating solutions to elevate the overall prosperity of rural areas however with particular reference to equity.

Social justice as a concept and practice has been foundational pillar of Ambedkar’s thought and practice. For his social justice which means prosperity and happiness to largest number of society is essential condition for emancipation of human spirit. Is lifelong crusade against oppression and exploitation of marginalised sections reflects his commitment to actualise the notion of social justice Jatava, 2006). This paper explores the social justice dimension of Ambedkar thought and practice in the domain of rural development.

Even though Ambedkar was a strong critic of rural areas which he believes harbour untouchability, he was indeed aware of necessary of development. The rural development vision of Ambedkar has two components: firstly, he demonstrates how the Indian rural areas exclude majority of working population in the name of culture and tradition and second component is that he unveils such a vision for rural development which is capable of promoting inclusive development.

The ideas of Ambedkar on village systems of India can be analysed from three broad approaches. Those are: positioning his ideas in the discourse on rural nationalism in British India: his personal ideas on rural society of India and strategies he suggested to achieve rural egalitarianism.

I. Positioning Ambedkar in the discourse of rural nationalism

Nationalist, intelligentsia (Chandra, 2009) particularly of M.K. Gandhi was a strong exponent of rural nationalism. His book ‘Hind Swaraj’ published in 1909 advocates the gospel of ruralisation of India. For Gandhi the idea of rural India is more of spiritual and civilisational response to the British rule (Parel, 2010). Ambedkar in his article entitled ‘Small Holdings in India’ published in 1918 took different stand on the ide of ruralisation of
India. By adopting comparative perspective at global level, he highlighted the following points: Indian agriculture backward and not capable of generating surplus and improve the standard of living of population: Indian agriculture is burdened with over concentration of population and hence a domain of ideal labour: he highlighted the problem of disguised unemployment and perceived it as waste of human potential: he proposed the shifting of population gradually to non-farm sector to make population more productive and he also highlights the channelization benefits of industrialisation to rural areas which he calls as ‘reflex effect’. Of course finally he advocates that acceleration of development process in rural areas is the only remedy for socio-economic and political crisis in India.

Aforementioned process explicitly shows the way in which Ambedkar visualised development of Indian rural areas. All these measures according to Ambedkar need to implement by committed state machinery with the help of strong and benevolent state finance and policy. The argument Dr. Ambedkar advanced was that idealisation of Indian villages life is not enough to solve the critical problems rural India was subjected to, rather consorted effort is need with systematic approach.

II. Ambedkar’s critique of Rural Areas of India

Ambedkar views that on account of their anti-progressive stand village areas are incapable of progressing and creating healthy society. The volume five of collected works of Ambedkar shows his critique on Indian villages. He rejects the romantic notion of village communities created by the British, accepted and propagated by nationalist intelligentsia. He proposes that Hindu social system exclude Dalits from having a meaningful life. He gives the following reasons:

1) Denial of co-existence
2) Denial of access to resources.
3) Denial of dignified life
4) Denial spiritual co-existence

The problems of untouchables in the rural areas summed up by Ambedkar in the following statement: ‘there is no trade in which they are engaged themselves as a means of earning a livelihood. They have not the capital for it and even if they had, no one would buy from them’ (Ambedkar, 2014). On account of these problems Ambedkar did not prefer villages to be a basic unit of future India as advocated by Gandhi.

The ideas of Ambedkar on Indian society in general and villages in particular indeed influenced by critique of anglicists (Moir and Lastopoli, 1999) on Indian society and his own personal experiences and interaction. For him villages are the domains wherein Dalits lost their human dignity. He also views that on account of their anti-progressive stand village areas are incapable of progressing and creating healthy society. The volume five of collected works of Ambedkar shows his critique on Indian villages. He rejects the romantic notion of village communities created by the British, accepted and propagated by nationalist intelligentsia (Rodrigues, 2002). He proposes that Hindu social system exclude Dalits from having a meaningful life. He gives the following reasons:

5) The untouchables must live in separate quarters sway from habitation of Hindus.
6) The untouchables must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow or pollution as the case may be.
7) It is offence for the untouchable to possess land and cattle.
8) It is offence for the Untouchable to possess ornaments and good cloths.
9) It is offence for the untouchable if he happens to come into the village on a sacred day.

These rules apparently reject three basic needs essential for survival of human beings. Those are as follows: segregation from social intercourse, denial of access to natural resources and denial of recognition of existence. These denials according to Ambedkar made Dalits as semi-human beings which means more of animals and less of human beings.
Besides this, Ambedkar also presents the occupational structure of Untouchables in villages. Those as follows:

1. Untouchables should carry the massage of any event took place in the House of Hindus.
2. Untouchables should carry on occupations such as carrying dead animals, cleaning streets, etc.
3. Untouchables must work when any occasion in House of Hindus.
4. On certain festivities, the untouchables must submit their women to members of village community to be made the object of indecent fun.

Besides this, Ambedkar also provides how the socio-economic mobility of untouchables prevented by Hindu society.

1. Possessing of land for untouchables is highly discouraged by Hindu society.
2. Untouchables were compelled to work as labour on the lands possessed by Hindus.
3. Untouchables were compelled to work for minimum wages fixed by Hindu landlords.

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III. Ambedkar ideas on development of rural areas

As an intellectual engaged himself with happenings in India, Ambedkar formulated certain strategies for development of rural areas. Ideas of Ambedkar on rural development can be captured from ‘Scheduled Caste Emancipation Draft Manifesto of 1951. Here he suggested the following suggestions for development of rural areas:

1. Control of the population by the way of intensive awareness programme at one level and establishment of rural clinics to ensure birth control scheme.
2. Agriculture must be mechanised. Agriculture in India can never become prosperous so long as the method of cultivation remains primitive.
3. To make mechanised farming possible, cultivation on small holding must be replaced by large farms.
4. To increase the yield, there must be provision for adequate manuring and for the supply of healthy seeds.
5. The state should take the responsibility providing all inputs to farmers.
6. There should be separate agricultural settlement for Scheduled Castes by allocation of government lands.
7. Effective management of forests to stabilise monsoon systems and hydraulic systems. This is to be achieved by extensive afforestation of dry and aired areas.
8. Provision of continuous irrigation to farmers and as well as electricity at lower cost.
9. Distribution of all surplus lands to all landless in general and Untouchables in particular.
10. Minimum wage regulations need to be implemented in agriculture.
11. Provision of cooperative credit at lower interests rate.
12. Advocated for cooperative and collective forming under guidance of the state.
13. State must ensure that there shall be no landless labour.
14. Proposed the concept of agricultural income tax to bring about equity in taxation (Thorat and Kumar, 2008).

Besides aforementioned points Ambedkar also suggested the following measures to strengthen the agriculture sector of India which is a backbone of Indian economy: establishment of research institutes: experimental and demonstrative forms: provision of agricultural education and scientific and efficient pest controlling system. These measures for Ambedkar capable of modernising Indian agriculture and bring about prosperity in rural areas of India.
Conclusion

Ambedkar has been one of the significant contributors who shaped the destiny of Modern India. In spite of his critical stand on rural areas, he evolved and suggested several innovative measures to development of rural areas in general and agriculture in particular. These measures are quite useful to contemporary public policies and rural development measures to achieve inclusive society in rural India. Obviously inclusive society in essentially require to achieve social justice and egalitarian socio-economic order which Ambedkar dreamed about and tried to make it as reality.

References

B R Ambedkar’s significance in Indian history has been largely credited to the struggle for Dalit rights, but his views on nationalism have received less attention. For Ambedkar, the Indian national movement was dominated by the elite who would perpetuate the caste system in independent India. He envisaged the transformation of India into a modern, progressive country, a necessary condition for which would be the annihilation of caste. Ambedkar’s views on nationalism more than emerging from a disdain towards anti-imperialist rule stemmed from a need to restructure the prevailing socio-economic Sustainable and inclusive growth of rural India through livelihoods. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Government organisation. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare, Government of India. Government organisation. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban, Government of India. Government organisation. Government organisation. Proving economies of scale during crisis times rural SHG women are using the #AGEY Vehicle mounted with a Mike to sell the masks and to deliver awareness messages on #COVID19 #SHGDidisFightCovid19 PMO India, Narendra Modi, Narendra Singh Tomar, Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, Aajeevika - National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Press Information Bureau - PIB, Government.