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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: The Man with a Vision of Inclusive Development

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Dr B. R. Ambedkar is today respected mainly, perhaps even exclusively, as a dalit leader who introduced the cause of their excluded community in the freedom struggle. Those who thus limit him to one community ignore his remaining features which are as important as his status as a dalit leader. He was an intellectual who enunciated dalit aspirations and demanded justice for them in a language that the decision-makers could understand. He was also as an honest political leader who as the law minister, coordinated the writing of the Constitution and made an effort to introduce the concept of social justice in it. Dr Ambedkar deserves to be admired for all such attributes, not merely as a dalit who reached the top. Over and above them is one of his little known facet - his development vision that combined economic growth with social justice and added caste equality to it. The effort in this paper is to understand that facet of Dr Ambedkar.

Ambedkar the Man

The Constitution of India has been commended as a document that upholds individual rights and credit is given to Dr B. R. Ambedkar for including this value in it. However, those who praise him for upholding individual rights ignore the fact that he did not limit himself to this value. He was aware that Indian society is unequal focus on individuals alone could divert attention from some groups like the dalits that have been subordinate for centuries. That is why he paid attention also to communities that have been suppressed in the history of India and can be further marginalised by the powerful sections of society if adequate measures are not taken in their favour. He expressed this ambiguity existing in the Constitution when he said while presenting it to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949 that the document ensured political democracy but every Indian also had a right to social and economic democracy. To ensure it India needed the type of development whose benefits could reach every Indian (Guha 2010). He was thus expressing his apprehension that focus on individual rights alone could go against communities that have not been allowed to compete as equals in the history of India and if political and economic inputs are introduced without respect for their specificity, they would further intensify inequalities.

This statement has also to be situated in the context of the debate prior to and immediately after independence around India's post-1947 development model. The colonial regime had left the country underdeveloped so its leaders had to make a major investment in its development. But they held different views on its nature. Some of them, for example Jawaharlal Nehru and P. C. Mahalanobis, thought of technology as the solution for all of India's problems. They believed in massive investment on capital intensive sophisticated technology based projects. On the other side Mahatma Gandhi and his followers linked their vision of economic development to the village republic that they propagated. The premise of the third group of actors namely India's emerging entrepreneurs who wrote the Bombay Plan 1945, was that economic growth could by itself solve India's social problems (Joseph 2014).

However, very few of them had realised that while keeping India as a whole undeveloped the colonial rulers had done greater damage to the subaltern classes particularly to dalits and tribals than to the dominant castes and classes. Dr Ambedkar was among the few who knew that these communities had suffered more than the rest had done though a small section of them had found ways of improving their economic status by commercialising some of their traditional products. A major source of the negative impacts they felt was the individual ownership based colonial land laws and acquisition under them. Those laws were an attack on the *jajmani* system of exchange between the landless service groups and the land owning castes. The land owners shared some of their produce with the service providers in exchange for their labour. It was an unjust system but it provided them material security while keeping them socially subordinate. The colonial laws that moved away from *jajmani* turned a large number of dalit or scheduled caste (SC) landless labourers, other service providers, and community property resource (CPR) dependent tribes into cheap labour. They destroyed the material security of dalit landless labourers without in any way adding to their social status (Fernandes 1996). Thus impoverished and further marginalised by the legal and social changes, a large number from these subaltern communities surrendered and were transported as indentured labour in slave-like conditions to mines and plantations in India and to British colonies in Africa, the West Indies, the Pacific and Southeast Asia (Sen 1979: 8-12). Some of them resisted their marginalisation, so history records many tribal and some dalit struggles in the colonial age (Mackenzie 1995).

Because of this process of which he had an inkling though he did not understand it fully, Dr Ambedkar is among the few who believed that while not ignoring economic growth and technology one should go beyond it to invest in areas that can be of use to the excluded communities. He felt that technology could be controlled by the dominant classes so it had to be guided for the social objective of its benefits reaching the powerless groups. The views of other leaders on this issue will be discussed in the paper before presenting the vision of Dr Ambedkar who attempted to combine economic growth with social justice which included caste equality.

The Development Debate

The main discussion immediately prior to and after Indian independence was not on the need for development but on the approach to it. All the post-1947 leaders knew that India needed investment for economic growth because the colonial regime had left the sub-continent undeveloped in order to support the industrial revolution in the metropolitan country. Though colonialism was legitimised in the name of Europe's civilising mission in reality it was meant to support the colonising country's industrial revolution by supplying capital and raw material to it and creating a captive market for its finished products (Rothermund 1992: 10-11). It meant that the foreign rulers had to destroy all that stood in the way of this objective, beginning with the destruction of the nascent textile industry in the sub-continent in order to turn it into a captive market for the industrial products of their own country. The land and forest laws were changed and the taxation system was reorganised in order to turn the colony into a supplier of raw materials and capital for the industrial revolution in the colonising country (Worsley 1973). Because they were aware that India had remained undeveloped, there was consensus among the leaders that the country needed investment in development and that it should be at a fast pace.

Together with the consensus around the need for economic development, the leaders of Independent India were also aware of their social obligation i.e. the need to ensure that the benefits of progress reached the biggest possible number in India. But there was difference of opinion on its nature and on the means to achieve this objective. They had before them only the western model of development that was to some extent supplemented by the Soviet approach of the State taking control of the heights of the economy. Most Indian leaders believed that the western as well as Soviet models were purely technology based and they wanted to take that path in their effort to develop India. A few of them were aware that the western countries had impoverished the colonies in order to become rich themselves. But they too assumed that sophisticated technology was basic to their growth so they believed that through the mixed economy that involved the public sector taking control of the heights of the economy, the State could ensure social equity. They thought that technology guided by this approach or controlled by the State as in the Soviet Union, would solve the socio-economic problems of unemployment, poverty and illiteracy (Joseph 2014). They did expect to encounter some temporary problems but they believed that eventually the benefits would reach every Indian.

This thinking is based on the trickle-down theory. Recently, two of India's well known economists, Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagawati engaged in a debate on this question vis-a-vis India's development strategy (Patnaik 2011). Sen was of the view that the trickle-down approach is futile and that the emphasis has to be on improving primary education and health care while Bhagawati wanted the free market to do its work unhindered because the benefits will eventually reach the people (Palit 2013: 2). That the post-independence leaders accepted the trickle-down theory is understandable because they had no other model to fall back upon. Today, however, data indicate that instead of the benefits trickling down to the majority the model has ensured the comforts of the middle class at the cost of the poor (Kurien 1997). It shows the need to focus on policy formulation and implementation that can reach the grassroots level. However, also the neo-liberal economy is being legitimised by thinking that GDP growth will eventually benefit all. So this view is held by most economists in India and elsewhere who support globalisation.

The Mixed Economy

Indian planners opted for the mixed economy based on this thinking. However, its origin is in the Bombay Plan 1945 prepared by 8 eminent men including J. R. D. Tata and G. D. Birla. They came together in 1944, and "wrote a 15-year vision for the Indian economy to be circulated among their influential acquaintances." Their social vision was based on an economic growth approach. "They wanted per capita income to double in 15 years, and every Indian to enjoy a minimum standard of living — for instance, to have access to 30 yards of cloth in a year and at least 100 square feet of space to call home. They wanted government to exercise tight oversight over industry. "Practically every aspect of economic life will have to be so rigorously controlled by government that individual liberty and freedom of enterprise will suffer a temporary eclipse," they declared" (Joseph 2014). The Bombay Plan 1945 thus gave an idealistic vision of development without specifying the means. On this path the leaders built the mixed economy.

Basic to the Plan was its statement that since the private sector lacked the wherewithal to invest in the long gestation infrastructure like steel and power, the State should build it with the taxpayer's money and leave the profit-making consumer industries to private entrepreneurs

(Vyasulu 1998). Thus, those who formulated the Bombay Plan 1945 attempted to deal with the social issue of the benefits reaching every Indian from a purely economic perspective. They assumed that the benefits of economic growth will eventually trickle down to every Indian. Accepting this approach the Second five year plan 1956-61 stated that its aim was a movement towards equality (Planning Commission 1956: 236). The Third Plan (Planning Commission 1961: Approach Paper No. 7) added: "India has an old traditional society rooted in thousands of years of history. Far reaching changes in social customs and institutions are necessary—and have been started—to build up a technically advanced society which offers more equal opportunities and accords priority to economic growth over social justice." Nation-building was the objective of most planners who accepted this approach. The objective of the post-independence inputs was not to change the Indian economy to suit the British industrial revolution as it was prior to 1947 but development suited to the needs of all Indians. Since they attributed western progress to technology they attempted modernisation based on it to catch up with the rich countries.

The planners who opted for this model were convinced that since India lagged behind the West, she should do in a few decades what the West took a century to do. Some like Jawaharlal Nehru knew that basic to the progress of the West was the exploitation of its working class at home and of the colonies abroad. But he as well as P. C. Mahalanobis, the brain behind the mixed economy, considered technology the main solution to India's socio-economic problems. They had also seen the effort of the Soviet Union to combine a heavy industry based model with social justice. But they also knew that this effort went hand in hand with dictatorship and violation of civil liberties and they wanted to be free from such repression. In *The Discovery of India* Nehru (1946: 64-65) spoke of the need to ensure industrialisation within a democratic framework without the capitalist exploitation of workers and socialist dictatorship. To achieve it India had to modernise herself by changing her traditions and freeing herself from superstition. Based on this vision he declared schemes like the Hirakud dam the temples of modern India.

Gandhi and Ambedkar

To some extent Mahatma Gandhi held a view similar to that of Amartya Sen though he did not know or use the nomenclature of trickle-down effect. He is also among those who realised that the colonising countries had become rich by exploiting their colonies. So the Mahatma (Gandhi 1948: 26) cautioned the leaders of the freedom movement against following the western path. He opposed not industries but industrialism, or development based on the type of technology and consumption pattern that are beyond the reach of the majority. He argued that a small country like England had impoverished half the world in order to ensure a rich lifestyle for its citizens. So he was afraid that if a big country like India followed this path, it would im impoverish many more people in the world. He opted for the village republic and grassroots level development. Some of his followers added that since India did not have colonies, its middle class would impoverish the poor for their own comforts (Fernandes 2008: 107-108).

However, like most other leaders who opted for different paths of development, Gandhi too ignored the Indian caste and gender based unequal society in which the benefits of technical inputs reach the already powerful unless steps are taken to move towards inclusive development. He too believed that India as a whole was exploited by the colonial power and did not realise that the impact of colonialism was felt more intensely by the communities like dalits that had been

treated as people without rights in the social history of India. That was the difference between Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the remaining leaders including Gandhi who viewed India as a united whole and refused to recognise caste and other divisions within it. On the other side, Dr Ambedkar knew that even the impact of developmental inputs is felt differentially by each group. As stated above, colonialism did not affect every group equally. The legal changes as well as land acquisition and exploitation of mineral and natural resources meant to support the European industrial revolution had more negative impacts on the tribals and dalits than on the rest of the population. It meant that also post-1947 inputs would affect them differentially.

Dr Ambedkar gave expression to that different understanding of Indian society when he said while presenting the Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, that the document he put before the Founding Fathers of the Republic ensured political democracy. But India required also social and democracy and it canbe by the benefits economic development reaching every citizen. He thus saw the need for inputs that could benefit the subaltern communities. It explains his stand on industries He supported fast industrialisation not because he accorded priority to technology but because he hoped that industries would produce revenue that could be used for the education and health care of the poor and that the jobs they created would take the poor, dalits in particular, away from bondage and exploitation to alternative employment (Ramaiah 2013: 139-140). He did not specify all the steps required to combine economic growth with social justice. Probably he had some idea of the steps but not their details. However, he knew that special inputs are required in the form of education, health care and employment generation for the benefits of technology-based industrialisation to reach the hitherto excluded class. Without stating it in so many words, he upheld their right to the benefits of development. That required a combination of technology, education and access to income generating employment. In that sense he anticipated, without being aware of it, the Supreme Court interpretation of Article 21 on right to life as every citizen's right to a life with dignity (Vaswani 1992: 158).

Modernisation and Inequality

However, the planners introduced modernisation and an economic growth centred sophisticated technology-based model of development that for all practical purposes ignored the caste and gender based division of Indian society. They gave very little importance to social components aimed at changing the unequal society. Two schools of the emerging development economics of the 1950s clashed in this choice of the model of development. On one side the school led by Arthur Lewis argued that economic development is a process of capital accumulation and of transferring labour from low productivity traditional agricultural and other occupations to high productivity modern industry. That is made possible by capital accumulation. On the other side was the school led by Paul Romer and R. E. Lucas who stated that long-term development and economic growth are determined by investment in education and human capital formation. Lucas in particular attributed the huge difference in per capita incomes of nations to types of human capital formation (Sarkar 2007: 1434). Neither school discussed the social process that an unequal society required to ensure the access of the majority to its benefits.

Dr Ambedkar was almost certainly not exposed to this thinking. But based on his analysis of Indian society he concluded that technological progress should be combined with educational, health and other social inputs required to make development accessible to the hitherto excluded

classes. However, Indian planners opted for an infrastructure development based paradigm that required capital accumulation. Based on this option India borrowed money and sophisticated technology from the West as "foreign aid" to build capital intensive projects like major dams, steel, heavy electrical and machine tool plants and other schemes. The subaltern classes are not equipped to deal with the technology and other inputs that such modern processes. Access to their benefits requires cultural, psychological and social preparation in the form of formal education and technical training. Without such inputs meant to ensure that the hitherto neglected classes gain access to modern services, institutions like schools and hospitals can make the facilities and services like education and health available but not accessible to the majority. It also meant that affirmative action like reservations for the Scheduled Classes made education and other services available to them but the social conditions required to make them accessible were not met. Without such steps modern inputs can further enrich the powerful, impoverish and marginalise the powerless and intensify inequalities (de Souza 1986: 26). At independence literacy was low in India as a whole and much lower in the tribal and dalit communities, especially women among them. Most of those who had access to education belonged to the dominant castes and classes. There are indications that in the absence of social change, the benefits of the inputs have reached the middle and upper classes but poverty has increased and is growing among the powerless. With greater profit orientation of globalisation the social arena is being further neglected and no question is asked about who pays its price and who gets the benefits (Kurien 1997: 134-135).

That what Dr Ambedkar envisaged was not a dream but could be put into practice is seen from the experience of East Asian countries like Korea, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia under Soekarno. Though these Asian Tigers are often presented as successful models of capitalist development, in practice they combined economic growth with social equity. They too made a high investment in heavy industry but also invested 8 to 15 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) in the social sector of education, health, nutrition and hygiene. This approach prepared most of their population for the benefits of development. For example, the effort of mainland China was to raise a majority from misery to poverty i.e. meeting the basic needs. It seems to have succeeded with 80 per cent of its population. The Malaysian *bhumiputra* (sons of the soil) policy of the 1970s shows that it is possible to extend this approach also to affirmative action. The policy favours the Malays who are 60 per cent of its population but lacked economic and social power till then. It stipulated that a percentage of all jobs at every level in the *private and public sectors* be reserved for the Malays. But going beyond this legal position the State made a massive investment in their education, health, hygiene and nutrition in order to make it possible for most of them to compete as equals with groups that had held power till then. Thus it made the institutions accessible to most Malays (Colonel-Ferer 1998).

India, on the contrary, made free education and jobs in the public sector available to members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes but took no positive steps to ensure that they became accessible to all of them. Without such steps the benefits can reach only those who enter the school. Those who are unable to reach the class room are excluded from it. A majority of the scheduled classes lack the social infrastructure required to access the benefits of the reservations. By not going beyond the legal provision of reservations India made the services available to the scheduled classes. In the absence of other enabling measures, only a small minority gained access to them (Mencher 2013: 88-89). India's investment in education, health and rural

development has not gone beyond 6 per cent. After liberalisation, basic to it is privatisation even of social services, it has fallen below 5 per cent (The Probe Team 1999).

Conclusion

In the light of the stand of Dr B. R. Ambedkar an effort has been made in this short paper to understand the social and economic forces required to make development inclusive. Most leaders of Independent India failed to realise that technology and economic growth cannot by themselves solve the social problems of centuries of discrimination and make the benefits of development accessible to communities that have hitherto been suppressed and excluded from the social processes. Unlike most other leaders Ambedkar saw the need to introduce many inputs beyond technology to reach this social objective. Though today he is presented only as a dalit leader his development vision is one of the components that take him beyond one community to turn him into a proponent of inclusive development i.e. leader of all the communities particularly those that have been excluded from economic and social progress.

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