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Dr Ambedkar and Formation of United Maharashtra

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[Today, Maharashtra is on the verge for its completion of sixty years of formation. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar played significant role in the formation of United Maharashtra. As well as, he suggested to divide Maharashtra into three parts and stressed on the formation of three states. He also recommended the division of Uttar Pradesh into three states, Bihar into three, and Madhya Pradesh into two states. Dr. Ambedkar backed the demand of united Maharashtra when the division of Mumbai from Maharashtra got momentum. He instructed his party members to participate in this movement. As far as the progression of Maharashtra is concerned, the demand of independent Vidarbha and Marathwada state has been getting impetus from the formation of Maharashtra. Vidarbha and Marathwada are still lagging behind from the expected standards of development as compared to other regions of Maharashtra.]

The demand of linguistic reorganization of states had been increasing during British rule in India. British Government had taken some steps towards it. Congress Party propagated its agenda in this context in the 1920s conference. Government gradually inclined towards the linguistic reorganization of the states as per the increasing demand of the people. Dr. Ambedkar kept himself aloof from the regional conflicts. But he strongly advocated linguistic reorganization when he felt its necessity. He supported linguistic reorganization of the states to maintain regional balance. He had also shown his willingness to form many states on the linguistic basis.

Many small states have been recently formed i.e., Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, and Telangana. The demand of separate state is spurring in various states of India such as Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Harit Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh, Bodoland in Assam and Naga state for Naga tribals. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts regarding reorganization of the states are significant in this context. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of Dr. Ambedkar on this issue and its usefulness to solve existing issues of various states in the country. Thus, it is essential to retrospect his thoughts in this context.

Demand of Linguistic Reorganization

The necessity of linguistic reorganization of the states had been the matter of discussion since 1903.[1] The demand of linguistic reorganization of every state had been stirring-up in India since pre-independence era. In 1917, Prof. V. W. Tamhankar of Jaipur in his 'Lokshikshan' periodical had proposed the idea of connecting Marathi speaking people's regions in Hyderabad princely state and Warhad Central Province, with the Marathi speaking districts in Mumbai state.[2] Thereafter, the demand of linguistic reorganization of Karnataka had been advocated in 1938. At that time, Dr. Ambedkar opined that it was the inappropriate time for linguistic reorganization of the country. In his mouthpiece entitled Janta, he stated that the separation of Karnataka from Mumbai or Madras region would be resulting into the unpredictable consequences of linguistic reorganization movement in Maharashtra as well as Gujarat regions.[3]

Dr. Ambedkar stated while about division of Karnataka that, "...the people of these three prominent provinces have been happily residing in Mumbai area since last 115 years... I never discriminate between any region as well as never feel proud to be Maharashtrian. I also never inclined towards the discrimination between any language, region and culture. I also reject the principle of 'firstly, I am Hindi then I am a Hindu or Muslim'. I approve to be a Hindi, firstly and lastly and this is the only tendency which is congenial for the freedom struggle. Therefore, I strongly condemn the division of Karnataka."[4] Thus, Dr. Ambedkar had sternly rejected the idea of dividing Karnataka from Mumbai-Madras regions.

Demand of Independent Vidarbha

The demand of independent Vidarbha was stirring-up from the Marathi speaking areas of Central Province-Warhad. In 1940, many activists of Congress from Vidarbha established 'Mahavidarbha Sabha' and started the movement for independent Vidarbha.[5] G. T. Madkholkar, President of Marathi Sahitya Sammelan (Marathi Literary Convention) organized at Belgaon in 1946, passed a resolution regarding the demand of Maharashtra. As per the resolution, the committee was formed including the members like Datto Waman Potdar, Shankarrao Deo, Keshavrao Jedhe, S. H. Naware, and G. T. Madkholkar.[6]

Gopalrao Dalavi, a renowned Maratha leader in Nagpur, in his article in Tarun Bharat newspaper dated 23rd June 1946 appealed that, "Kunbi, Mali, Teli, Koshti, Untouchables, Kalar, Bhandari community's people in Maharashtra should come together considering themselves as Maratha".[7] Thereafter, Congress activists in Maharashtra established Council for United

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Maharashtra on 28th July 1946 to form United Maharashtra encompassing Vidarbha, Marathwada, and Mumbai regions and started its movement accordingly.[8]

Role of Dr. Ambedkar on the issue of United Maharashtra

Schedule Caste Federation was a prominent organization which was fighting for the issues of downtrodden people in Mumbai province. The members of United Maharashtra Committee realized that they couldn't organize the movement without participation of Schedule Caste Federation on the issue of United Maharashtra. So, Madkholkar and other prominent leaders including Shripadrao Naware went to meet Dr. Ambedkar in Siddhartha College in August 1946. At that time, Dr. Ambedkar suggested to committee's members, "...convey this issue to Dadasaheb Gaikwad by visiting him at Nashik as you have told it to me."[9] But, it was totally futile. Thereafter, Schedule Caste Federation had to face the defeat in 1952's General Elections.

It resulted into the idea to support other parties with the same ideologies. The demand of independent Vidarbha was the biggest hurdle in united Maharashtra movement. So, the leaders of united Maharashtra movement tried to dissuade the leaders from independent Vidarbha movement by approving some privileges to them and signed 'Nagpur Pact' on 28th September 1953.[10] It paved the way for the formation of United Maharashtra. Schedule Caste Federation Party endeavoured to participate in United Maharashtra Movement and it could be observed in contemporary epistolary.[11]

Dr. Kailashnath Katju proposed a bill regarding independent Andhra Pradesh in Upper House of the Parliament on 1st September 1953. Dr. Ambedkar expressed his views on this Bill on 2nd September 1953. He said, "...vernacularism is another form of casteism in our country. We handover the power of administration to a particular community which is most populous in the particular region when we form the separate linguistic province. It can be observed from the administration of many provinces. This community has started the system of casteism by exaggerating their sacred existence. It is widely known as the discrimination. This discrimination paves the way for injustice and this injustice creates malignant feelings among the people. Our vernacularism can't prove harmful for us if it is not marred by the casteism."[12]

But it happens prominently due to the dominance of casteism over vernacularism. Upper caste people treat untouchables like the slaves. That bill hadn't provisioned equal political, religious, social and economic rights of all castes. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar raised his voice against the bill.

Dr. Ambedkar austerely expressed his views regarding linguistic reorganization of the states. He recommended to divide Maharashtra into three states. In this context, he said, "...the first historical evidence regarding Maharashtra is identified during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. It is mentioned in the book entitled 'Mahavansh'. Ashoka sent many apostles for spreading Buddhism across India and this reference is cited in this regard. The reference of three Maharashtra is cited in the Pali literature as *'Trayi Maharashtrika'* which stands for three Maharashtra. This reference is the solid evidence of the existence of three states of ancient Maharashtra. It clearly indicates that the concept of Maharashtra's three states dates back to the ancient era."[13]

There is the reference of four Marathi provinces in Mahanubhav literature. These four provinces include Falenana means the Southern region, second encompasses the region till the end of Balaghat, third comprises the region of Godavari and Vainganga and the fourth was Warhad region.[14] As stated by Dr. Ambedkar, it clearly indicates that Maharashtra was not a particular state since ancient era. Its ancient traditions, social and economic condition, and contemporary lifestyle were completely different from each other. The population of Marathi speaking people were recorded at 3 crore 30 lakh 80 thousand at that time and the area of Marathi people was 1 Lakh 74 thousand 514 square miles.[15] It was so large area that it could not be merged in a single state and administer on it.

In this context, Dr. Ambedkar said, "...the Maharashtrian people who are demanding for the united Maharashtra haven't tried and trusted the massive area and population of Maharashtra... I can't understand the ideology behind the demand of united Maharashtra. There are two aspects which are totally different from each other. First one is independent state of Maharashtra and another one is a united state of Maharashtra. I support the different state of Maharashtra from Gujarati and Hindi speaking people. But I never support the united nature of independent Maharashtra. Maharashtra's people haven't rebelled against the Northern regions for which they need undivided alliance of Maharashtra..."[16] In this way, Dr. Ambedkar rationalized the issue of united Maharashtra.

But, the supporters of united Maharashtra stated, "If the education and daily administration of the state is governed by the language of majority of the community, then the state must be formed on the basis of vernacular aspects. If the state is multilingual, it gives rise to the problems. The medium of education and communication can be bilingual or multilingual. Therefore, it will be appropriate to reorganize the state on the basis of language. It is observed that the culture of the people changes according to their language, they have their own traditions, and specific literature. Linguistic reorganization of the state helps for the all-pervasive development on the basis of these things."[17]

'One Language, One State' was the sole concept of United Maharashtra with Mumbai movement. The main motive behind was to include the people who speak one language

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in a particular state without considering or tolerating others' regions, population and dissimilarity of condition. This theory proves completely erroneous and unjustified as there is not a single instance in the history in the support of this theory. So, this theory should be thrown away.[18] That's why Dr. Ambedkar recommended to form multiple states of a particular language speaking people. Large states dominate smaller ones. According to Dr. Ambedkar, Maharashtra should be divided into four parts to maintain the balance in administration.[19] He suggested division of Maharashtra in Maharashtra City State including Mumbai, Western Maharashtra, Central Maharashtra and Eastern Maharashtra. Dr. Ambedkar was Marathi by language and he was proud to be a Marathi. Still, he remained aloof from the regional conflicts.[20]

State Reorganization Commission published a report on 10th October 1955. Commission vetoed the demand of independent Maharashtra including Mumbai. At that time, Bhai Dange and Acharya Atre went to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to discuss the issue of United Maharashtra. Dr. Ambedkar clarified, "...I feel very proud of Maharashtra than others. But you should be Indian first and then whatever you wish to call yourself." But State Reorganization Commission formed flawed and inappropriate states for governance. Though the principle of 'One language of One State' has been enacted, injustice has been imposed on Maharashtra by tagging it as a bilingual state. We should collectively cast off this injustice.[21]

Thereafter, Central Government declared its verdict on 16th January 1956 stating Mumbai city as a Union Territory and remaining other regions would be considered as United Maharashtra. While condemning the decision, Dr. Ambedkar said, "Is there any place India worthier than Mumbai where people are politically powerful? And you are telling that you will bring them under the dominance of Central authority? Maharashtra and Mumbai's self-esteemed people will not tolerate this humiliation. You cannot compare Mumbai's people with Delhi and Manipur."[22] He was absolutely sure that Mumbai is an integral part of Maharashtra.

In this context, he said, "...Marathi people are too generous by heart. If Mumbai falls under Maharashtra, the rights of Non-Maharashtrians will not be grappled regarding the use of harbour. Mumbai's trade and industry is not flourished by Gujarati people, it was enhanced by Europeans and the officers of East India Company. Gujaratis were brought to Mumbai as the brokers or mediators necessary for the trade. They never came to Mumbai as traders... Maharashtra has supplied water and electricity to Mumbai. Separation of Mumbai from Maharashtra may dilapidate and endanger the financial structure of Mumbai... Mumbai is a part of Maharashtra. Marathi people have their rights over Mumbai. Even, Brahma can't separate Mumbai from Maharashtra."[23]

Dadasaheb Gaikwad asked Dr. Ambedkar regarding the role of Schedule Caste Federation amidst these circumstances. Dr. Ambedkar replied Dadasaheb Gaikwad, "...they should compel the government to stop the administration of Local Governance Institutions..."[24] He instructed Dadasaheb that Schedule Caste Federation should pass a resolution regarding the resignation of all party members elected on Bombay Municipal Corporation as the protest against the status of Union Territory given to Mumbai by Central Government.[25] While stating in the Upper House against the decision given by Central Government, Dr. Ambedkar said, "For the integrity of the country, Uttar Pradesh should be divided into three states, Bihar also into three and Madhya Pradesh into two states. Mumbai city and Marathwada also should be declared as the independent states. But Government is trying to impose the status of Nicobar on Mumbai. So, I will change my mind and stout-heartedly stand with Maharashtra's people to fight against this conflict..."[26]

As per the statement Dr. Ambedkar, Members of United Maharashtra Committee felt that he would participate in the movement. Amidst these circumstances, K. C. Thakre published a letter in a weekly Marathi newsletter entitled 'Jay Maharashtra' on 25th July 1956, requesting Dr. Ambedkar to participate and accept the leadership of Maharashtra.[27]

Committee enthusiastically worked after United Maharashtra Committee had decided to fight the general elections of 1957. A meeting of United Committee's members was organized in Mumbai to discuss about the participation of other parties. Mr. S. M. Joshi telegraphed Dadasaheb Gaikwad inviting him as a representative of Federation for the meeting.[28] In this meeting, Dadasaheb demanded committee members for allocating reserved seats as well as a general seat at every district for Schedule Caste Federation. Dr. Ambedkar conveyed Dadasaheb Gaikwad to arrange a meeting with committee's members at his house in Delhi in November 1956 regarding the agenda of forthcoming elections.[29] United Maharashtra Committee approved all the conditions of Schedule Caste Federation which included allocation of general seats to the candidates of Schedule Caste Federation and supporting them in winning it, all the reserved seats should be given to Schedule Caste Federation, committee should strive hard for the educational, social, political and economic development of the untouchables to eradicate atrocities or injustices meted out to them in the villages.[30]

Thereafter, Dr. Ambedkar entrusted all the rights to Dadasaheb Gaikwad regarding their role towards the movement initiated by United Maharashtra Committee. Then, Schedule Caste Federation rightfully entered in United Maharashtra Committee on 30th November 1956.[31] But, Dr. Ambedkar died on 6th December 1956 yet Schedule Caste Federation vigorously participated in the struggle for United Maharashtra and gave their remarkable contribution for it. Then, Schedule Caste Federation had been dissolved and Republican Party was

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established on 3rd October 1957. This party also supported the movement led by United Maharashtra Committee. So, this newly established Republican Party was divided into two groups regarding their participation in United Maharashtra Movement.

Conclusion

Maharashtra has been formed with Mumbai on 1st May 1960. But the principles of linguistic reorganization hadn't been truthfully followed while forming Maharashtra. So, Marathi speaking Dang district has been attached to Gujarat and some part of Belgaon had been included in Karnataka. It culminates into enraging discontent in these regions. Today, Maharashtra is on the verge to complete its sixty years of establishment. But these Marathi speaking regions are still alienated from Maharashtra. These regions are enthusiastic to come under the ascendency of Maharashtra and they are incessantly revolting for it. After thoroughly studying this entire duration, it can be observed that Maharashtra hasn't accomplished the expected standards of equal development purported by Dr. Ambedkar. The regional imbalance has been increasing rapidly as per the passage of time.

Vidarbha's people changed their minds for 'One Lingual' state by leaving behind the issue of independent Vidarbha for the sake of development, but they are still deprived of the development that they dreamt about. The backlog of Vidarbha has been increasing rapidly according to the passage of time. Therefore, the voice of independent Vidarbha is rejuvenating again with new spirit. The demand of separate state is also enraging in Harit Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh, Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Bodoland in Assam and Naga state for Naga tribals. Amidst these circumstances, the concept of small states propagated by Dr. Ambedkar is equally justifiable and can prove beneficial for the all-pervasive development of the state.

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