



## Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his thought on socialism in India: A critical evaluation

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### Abstract

In establishing an egalitarian society in India which is based on liberty, equality and fraternity and social justice, Ambedkar, the great Indian Constitution maker, struggled to find out avenues and means – intellectual, organizational and in terms of programs throughout his life. This study attempts to throw light on Ambedkar's quest for socialism in India with special reference to Marxism and Buddhism. He accepted the concept of class struggle but he felt that in the Indian set up, it had to be substantially redefined and ascribed a similar agenda to the Buddha and agreed that one of the major contradictions of capitalism was the social basis of its production in contrast to private appropriation. He criticized Marxism for subscribing to economic determinism, for its inadequate grasp of liberal democracy, for its inability to adequately understand the realm of ideologies and for considering moral values as historically conditioned. Though Ambedkar described his scheme of economic organization of the Indian society as state socialism, in view of its other features, we believe it appropriate to identify it democratic socialism. Moreover, collective farming, one of the major features of his model of democratic socialism, needs to be thoroughly reconsidered as it lacked viability. It is somewhat inconceivable how he could achieve socialism by eliminating socio-economic inequality without undermining the basic economic foundation of society on which the system of inequality was founded. The inability to resolve this contradiction ultimately led Ambedkar to find solace in Buddhism, with an attempt to present its teachings 'in a new light to suit modern class realities'. In fact, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a 'self-deception' and channeled the whole movement of workers and peasants led by him into 'reactionary and metaphysical conceptions'.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, socialism, India.

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## Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), the great Indian Constitution maker and ‘a symbol of revolt’ (as mentioned by Jawaharlal Nehru, The first Prime Minister of India), was one of the front-ranking nation-builders of modern India. He is popularly known as the ‘pioneer’ who initiated the ‘liberation movement’ of roughly sixty-five million untouchables of India. Yet, Dr. Ambedkar, notwithstanding all handicaps of birth, has made, by pursuit of knowledge in the humanities, social sciences, politics and law, an indelible imprint on the body politic of the country. A glance of his copious writings would evidently show that despite his preoccupations with the problems of the *dalits*(Untouchables), Ambedkar has in his own way, made significant contributions to the contemporary political ideas.

Looking back as well as analyzing Ambedkar’s social and political ideas is an inspiring and worthwhile experience. Ambedkar remains unrivalled till date in order to emphasize the critical importance of establishing democratic socialism and in painting an authentic picture of problems that beset India. In course of his public life over three decades, Ambedkar was fully convinced that politics should be the instrument to fight for justice in adorning all sections of the Indian people with freedom. As such, he untiringly worked towards establishing democratic socialism in the then Indian unjust society, the goal of justice for the untouchables, mainly through political means. In the course of these activities, Ambedkar developed his own ideas about society and politics of the contemporary India. Viewed from the subject of political science, those ideas obviously merit attention. But, scholars who have worked on Ambedkar’s different ideas fail to give due importance on these aspects of his thinking. As a background to this study, it has been considered appropriate to present the position of Ambedkar on the central issues with which Ambedkar was preoccupied and the issues which continue to confront the Indian society and its polity and economy.

This study containing Ambedkar’s self-generated idea on socialism and the social structure and political system and vision of Ambedkar on this particular issue that continues to confront us as critical, will help in unfolding the various dimensions related to the contemporary society and its polity. The canvas of Ambedkar’s work is vast but the issues discussed in this study are a modest attempt to mirror the breadth of his idea on socialism.

Socialism is an economic and political theory based on public ownership or common ownership and cooperative management of the means of production and allocation of resources. Henri de saint (1760–1825), who coined the term *socialism*, advocated technocracy and industrial planning. Saint-Simon, Friedrich Engel and Karl Marx advocated the creation of a society that allows for the widespread application of modern technology to rationalize economic activity by eliminating the

anarchy of capitalist production. They argued that this would allow for economic output (or surplus value) and power to be distributed based on the amount of work expended in production.

Some socialists advocate complete nationalization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, while others advocate state control of capital within the framework of a market economy. Socialists inspired by the soviet model of economic development have advocated the creation of centrally planned economics directed by a state that owns all the means of production. Others, including Yugoslavian, Hungarian, East German and Chinese communist's government in the 1970s and 1980s, instituted various forms of market socialism, combining co-operative and state ownership models with the free market exchange and free price system (but not free prices for the means of production). Libertarian socialists (including social anarchists and libertarian Marxists) rejects state control and ownership of the economy altogether, and advocates direct collective ownership of the means of production via co-operative worker's council and workplace democracy. Contemporary social democrats propose selective nationalization of key national industries in mixed economics, while maintaining private ownership of capital and private business enterprise.

In establishing an egalitarian society in India which is based on liberty , equality and fraternity and social justice , Ambedkar struggled to find out avenues and means – intellectual, organizational and in terms of programs throughout his life. His crusade against caste system and untouchability is well-recorded in modern India's socio-political history.

### **Materials and methods:**

In this section, an attempt has been made to throw light on Ambedkar's quest for socialism with special reference to *Marxism* and *Buddhism*. The article is divided into following subsections wherein section I concentrates on the caste system, which negates the very essence and spirit of democracy. Section II depicts the fundamentals of democratic socialism as a social system, followed by the model of democratic socialism as visualized by Ambedkar. In section III, we analyze Ambedkar's insistence on democratic means of social change and his ideological stance with regard to Marxism and communism. Section IV presents a critical analysis on Ambedkar's effort to prove the superiority of Buddhism as an ideal over Marxism. Ultimately, section V presents final remarks.

## **I**

### **Discussion and analysis**

Ambedkar's obsessive concern with Hinduism ultimately induced him to believe that it was not congenial to the promotion of the socialist causes. To him, Hinduism was antithetical to socialism

because it advocated *Chaturvarna* system that divided the Hindu society into four classes, namely *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra*. Caste system owed its origin to the *chaturvarna* arrangement in the society dominated by Hinduism. Contesting the argument that caste system was ‘another name for division of labour’, Ambedkar pointed out that it was not merely ‘a division of labour’ but division of labourers’. According to him, civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society, division of labour is accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments. Caste system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour- it is a hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above another. <sup>(1)</sup> Hinduism did not simply create classes but, according to Ambedkar, it also made it a matter of unalterable dogma. It gave an ‘official gradation’, ‘fixation’ and ‘permanency’ on the principle of ‘graded inequality’ in society. In the absence of uniformity among its people, Hinduism could only create classes without helping them to form a society. On the other hand, what was required for the formation of a society was the individual’s participation and share in a common activity so that the emotions aroused in him would animate the others. But, the caste system prevented common activity and by doing so, it had prevented the Hindus’ from becoming a society with a unified life and the consciousness of its own being. <sup>(2)</sup> As an economic system, untouchability permitted ‘exploitation without obligation’. Therefore, Ambedkar felt that untouchability was not only ‘a system of unmitigated economic exploitation,’ it was ‘a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation’<sup>(3)</sup>. Therefore, the roots of social inequality and socio-economic exploitation lay therefore in the caste system which was an integral part of Hindu civilization and culture. As such Hinduism did not believe in a ‘casteless society’ and therefore did not aim at the establishment of a ‘classless society’ at which on the contrary socialism aimed. Moreover, the basis of socio-economic segregation under Hinduism, Ambedkar noted philosophically, was contempt. And in an atmosphere where contempt prevailed, socialism could not operate effectively. <sup>(4)</sup>

Given the undemocratic nature of Hindu society characterized by inequality and socio-economic as well as political exploitation, Ambedkar considered that social reforms would precede economic reforms. He considered that ‘the maker of political constructions must take account of social forces’. <sup>(5)</sup>

Ambedkar joined issues with the Indian socialists on whether ‘economic reform by equalization of property’ should have precedence over every other kind of reform. Having analyzed different factors involved in the realization of socialism, Ambedkar observed that the economic reform contemplated by the socialists could not come out unless there was a revolution resulting in the seizure of power. And, the ‘seizure of power must be by proletariat’. But people would not join in a

revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution was achieved, they would be treated equally and that there would be no discrimination of caste and creed <sup>(6)</sup>.

## II.

Ambedkar also championed the cause of labour .As a labour member of the British government, he made it clear that in all battles between the owners and workers, he would side with the labour .He observed that there were two enemies of the Indian working class: *Brahmanism* and capitalism. By *Brahmanism*, he meant the negation of the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity, and considered that the effects of *Brahmanism* were not confined only to such social rights as intermarriage. Under this system, civic rights were also denied. ‘So omniscient is *Brahmanism* that it even affects the field of economic opportunities’<sup>(7)</sup>. As such he urged the workers to uproot *Brahmanism*, ‘the spirit of inequality from among the workers’. He, however, felt sorry at the plight of prevailing trade union movement which ‘stagnant and stinking pool’ was caused by the timidity, selfishness and misguidance of its leaders. ‘The welfare between different unions was far more deadly than what existed, if any at all, between workers and owners’. He also accused the communists of misusing the power that they had once secured. In this connection, Ambedkar criticized M.N.Roy for opposing the existence of a separate party for the labours within the Indian National Congress. He said that Roy was a puzzle to many as he was to him. A point of view which must have made Lenin turn in his grave.<sup>(8)</sup> Ambedkar viewed that the first and foremost aim of Indian politics would be to destroy imperialism, Ambedkar’s observed that if after the disappearance of imperialism in India, the labour would have to fight the landlords ,and moneylenders who would remain in India to bleed people ,it should have its own organization from the moment to fight capitalism as much as imperialism.<sup>(9)</sup> As regards the labor’s right to strike, Ambedkar’s was of the view that it would be applied sparingly. A strike was, to him, nothing more than a breach of contract of service. But, he considered it to be a “civil wrong”, not a crime”: it was another name for the “right of freedom” .<sup>(10)</sup> while discussing labour problems, Ambedkar’s had in his mind not only industrial labour but also agriculture labour too. He opined that similar conditions of work, provident funds, employer’s liability, workmen’s compensation, health insurance including invalidity should be opened to all sorts of labour, whether it was industrial labour or agriculture labour.<sup>(11)</sup>

In 1947 he had prepared a Memorandum on the safeguards for the Scheduled castes for submitting to the Constituent assembly on behalf of the All India Scheduled castes Federation. The Memorandum was drafted in the form of articles of the constitution.<sup>(12)</sup>

From these premises, it logically follows that according to, in order to treat individual as an end in himself, the economic democracy must be the foundation of political democracy. In this

connection he has cited the cases of unemployed and employed persons, advocated state socialism with parliamentary Democracy, advanced reasons for nationalization of industry and agriculture, advocated the provision these as a part of the Constitutional Law of the land, giving reasons for not leaving them to the Legislature to bring them into practice by the ordinary process of Law.<sup>(13)</sup>

Ambedkar's idea of constitutional state socialism with parliamentary Democracy was detailed out in his Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD) over the Directive Principles of State policy.<sup>(14)</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar advocated state socialism in the field of industry and also state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation. Ambedkar wanted to include the provisions of state ownership of agriculture in the fundamental rights as these provisions are unalterable by any act of Legislature and executive. The purpose is to protect the liberty of the individual from invasion by other individuals. The connection between individual liberty and the shape and form of the economic structure of society becomes real only when state socialism has been established through political democracy. Ambedkar wanted to establish state socialism not through dictatorship but through political democracy.<sup>(15)</sup>

A staunch believer in constitutionalism as well as liberalism, Ambedkar wanted the objectives of the Indian Constitution to be 'to remove social, political and economic inequality by providing better opportunities to the submerged classes,' and 'to make it possible for every subject to enjoy freedom from want and freedom from fear'<sup>(16)</sup>. He also wished the constitution to lay down that subjecting a person to forced labour or to involuntary servitude 'shall be an offence'<sup>(17)</sup>. In order to translate these premises into reality, Ambedkar recommended the reorganization of the Indian economy along with the following lines.

As regards the protection against economic exploitation Ambedkar suggested *inter alia* that that the state should declare as a 'part of the law of its constitution':

- 1) that industries which were, or might be declared to be, key industries should be owned and run by the state;
- 2) that industries which were not key, but basic industries should be owned by the state and should be run by it or by corporations run by it;
- 3) that insurance should be a monopoly of the state, and the state should compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as would be prescribed by the legislature;

- 4) that agriculture should be a state industry;
- 5) that the state should acquire the subsisting rights in such industries ,insurance and agricultural land held by private individuals, whether as owners, tenants or mortgagees and pay them compensation in the form of debenture equal to the value of his or her right in the land ; provided that in reckoning the value of land , plant or security no account should be taken of any rise therein due to emergency , of any potential or unearned value or any value for compulsory acquisition;
- 6) that the state should determine how and when the debenture holder should be entitled to claim cash payment;
- 7) that the debenture should be transferable and inheritable property but neither the debenture holder nor the transferee from the original holder nor his heir should be entitled to claim the return of the land or interest in any industrial concern acquired by the state or be entitled to deal with it in any way;
- 8) that the debenture holder should be entitled to interest on his debenture at such rate as may be defined by law , to be paid by the state in cash or in kind as the state would deem fit ;
- 9) that agricultural industry should be organized on the following basis:
  - a) the state should divide the land acquired into farms of standard size and the farms for cultivation to residents of the village as tenants (made up of group of families) to cultivate on the following conditions : (i) the farms should be cultivated as a collective farm;(ii) the farm should be cultivated in accordance with rules and directions issued by the government , and (iii) tenants should share among themselves in the manner prescribed the produce of the farm left after the payment of charges properly leviable on the farm;
  - b) the land should be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that there would be no landlord ,no tenant and no landless labourer ; and
  - c) It should be the obligation of the state to finance the cultivation of the collective farms by the supply of water ,draft animals, implements, manure, seeds, etc.<sup>(18)</sup>

On the whole, Ambedkar's plea was evidently for a state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation and a modified form of State Socialism in industry. For, he

thought, without the supply of capital by the state, neither land nor industry could yield good results.

State Socialism is essential for the rapid industrialization of India. Private enterprise cannot do it and if it did, it would produce those inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe and which should be a warning to Indians.<sup>(19)</sup> Nationalized insurance was also planned with a two-fold objective: to provide an individual 'greater security' than a private insurance firm because the former could pledge the state resources as a security for the ultimate payment for his insurance money, and, to enable the state to have necessary resources 'for financing its economic planning in the absence of which it would have to resort to borrowing from the money market at a high rate of interest'<sup>(20)</sup>. In his urge for the need for State Socialism in important field of economic life, Ambedkar was, however, reluctant to leave its establishment to the will of the legislature. He made it categorical that the state socialism should be established by the law of the constitution and be 'unalterable by any act' of the legislature and executive. For, according to Ambedkar, one 'essential condition' for the success of a planned economy was that it should not be 'liable to suspension or abandonment'; instead it should be 'permanent'. He was not, however, hopeful that this permanence could be secured under parliamentary democracy inasmuch as in that type of government the policy of the legislature and executive was the policy of majority for the time being. Under this government, the majority in one election might be in favour of State Socialism in industry and agriculture. At the next election the majority might oppose it .

Ambedkar at the same time for obvious reasons refused to accept dictatorship as an alternative which could give state socialism permanence for its fructification, as it denied individual freedom and parliamentary democracy as a proper form of government for a 'Free Society'. The problem was therefore, according to him, 'to have State Socialism without Dictatorship, to have state socialism with Parliamentary Democracy,' and for its solution, he suggested 'Constitutional State Socialism with Parliamentary Democracy'<sup>(21)</sup>.

Ambedkar was conscious of the intimate connection between individual liberty and the shape and structure of the economic aspect of social life. Therefore, in order to make the principle of one man, one value real and operative, he wanted political democracy to be reinforced by economic democracy. At a time when the Indian National Congress had not even thought of formulating a definite programme of action, it was Ambedkar who forcefully put forward the principle of one man, one value. On 19 January 1931, addressing the Round Table Conference, he said:

'I belong to that class which takes its stand on democracy and which seeks to destroy monopoly in every shape and form. Our aim is to realize in practice our ideal of one man one value in all walks



of life, political, economic and social.’<sup>(22)</sup> Ambedkar did not believe that the constitutional law of democracy should go beyond adult suffrage and fundamental rights. But, he thought that the scope of Constitutional law was not only to prescribe the shape and form of the political structure of society; ‘it was equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of economic structure of society, if democracy is to live up to its principle of one man, one value.’<sup>(23)</sup> Along with the establishment of political democracy, Ambedkar urged the need for economic democracy as the ideal of Indian Constitution. In view of Ambedkar’s, the object in framing the constitution was not only to lay down that ‘our ideal is political democracy’ and to prescribe that ‘every government whatever it is in power, shall strive to bring about economic democracy.’<sup>(24)</sup> While commenting on the ‘Objective Resolution’ moved by Jawaharlal Nehru on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1946, Ambedkar thought that it should have included some provision ‘whereby it would have been possible for the State to make economic, social and political justice a reality.’ It should have stated that ‘in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country that there would be nationalization of industry and nationalization of land.’<sup>(25)</sup>

### III.

During his student life, Ambedkar came across the writings of Karl Marx during his student days in London. Impressed by the writings of Karl Marx, Ambedkar once announced that ‘the number of books he had read on communism exceeded the number of books read by all communist leaders of India put together. At the same time, it is true that Ambedkar never took any care to elaborate his views on Marx or Marxism throughout his intellectual life. A glimpse at his abundant writings would evidently reveal that he neither accepted the spirit of Marxism nor its contents, rather he was deeply instilled by the idea of Fabianism and in course of time, he developed his own brand of socialism’<sup>(26)</sup>.

Ambedkar was not inclined to Marxian socialism which is obvious from the above elucidation of his views on socialism. True, he considered Marx’s philosophy as ‘satisfying’ one ‘to the lower order’, but in his opinion, it was ‘a direction not a dogma’.<sup>(27)</sup> However, he refused to accept Marxian theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. That it could not have been otherwise was revealed from his apathy toward communism, which, which he never intended to conceal in his more than forty years old political life.

Ambedkar was deeply concerned with the fact that if the social structure in India were not altered, the prevailing system would likely to collapse pretty soon, and was afraid that if democracy did not work in India, the alternative was something of communism.<sup>(28)</sup> But in the same breath he pooh-poohed the theory of co-existence of democracy and communism as utterly as ‘utterly absurd’.

Ambedkar opined that communism 'is like a forest fire; it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way'.<sup>122</sup> Once he called Russian communism a 'fraud'.<sup>(29)</sup> Such pungent anti-communist vituperation of Ambedkar was not confined to theoretical plane only; that he developed somewhat a pathological contempt for it could be seen in his political activities too. For example, in September, 1938 while addressing a district conference of the Depressed classes at Masur, Ambedkar categorically caste aside any idea of his joining the labour movement led by the communists.<sup>(30)</sup> In that speech, he was reported to have declared:

'It is absolutely impossible for me to keep relations with the communists. I am an implacable enemy of the Communists.'<sup>(31)</sup> Similarly in the same vein, he opposed earlier the famous Bombay Textile strikes of 1928 and 1929 led by communists. However, W. N. Kuber informs that while Ambedkar cooperated with the first general strike in textile mills in 1928, he opposed the second, launched in April 1929 (see Dr. Ambedkar: a critical Study, op. cit., p 221)

Notwithstanding his contempt for communism, however, Ambedkar supported along with the communists, a strike of workers waged by about 60 trade union organizations in Bombay on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1938 as a protest against the Industrial Dispute Bill introduced in the Bombay Legislative Council (1938). However, that was the 'first and last' occasion when Ambedkar and the communists joined hands against the vested interests. That was the 'last' occasion of cooperation between them which is evident from Ambedkar's political activities till his death. While preparing for his party, All India Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) [This party came into being as a result of disbanding of Indian Labour Party by Ambedkar in July 1942] for the country's general elections in 1952, Ambedkar formulated its election manifesto in which it was stated, among others, that the SCF would have no alliance with the Communist Party of India. (Quoted in W.N.Kuber, loc.cit., p.226). Kuber also cites another example of Ambedkar's anti-communist stance. When the Peasant's and Workers' party (PWP) had accepted Marxism in its Dabhadi Thesis, Joyprakash Narayan reported to Ambedkar that S. S. More, the leader of PWP was a pro-communist and intended to merge his party into the Communist Party of India. Ambedkar was reported to have reacted that this was to happen, then More was ruining the masses.<sup>(32)</sup>

Practically, Ambedkar never was in agreement with the Communist assertion that 'industrial growth and class struggle would by themselves sweep away caste divisions and that therefore no special campaigns or struggles were necessary for the purpose.' It was the deep-rooted purpose of the communists 'to unite the working people against oppression and exploitation irrespective of caste and community' and to promote and facilitate this unity through 'common struggles'. This objective assessment and ensuring programme of action was not taken 'kindly' by Ambedkar.

Moreover, it has been pointed out, Ambedkar was deeply disturbed by the unity of the textile workers, displayed during the strikes in Bombay and the nation-wide strike wave led by the communists in early thirties. He warned his followers to be careful of the communists who were 'like ants attacking themselves to a jaggery piece.' He also alleged that in spite of their supports to the strikes, the untouchable workers were prevented from working in the weaving department in the textile mills because of pollution prejudices of caste workers, which the communists could not overcome despite all talks of class unity .

Three factors could be identified as having contributed to Ambedkar's disinclination for communism. First, he believed in constitutional means and in reforms to achieve his goal, in opposition to revolutionary communist method. Secondly, he was reluctant to accept the Indian working class to be a 'homogenous' class capable of 'leading a radical reconstruction of society as it was divided on caste lines and practiced caste discrimination'. Thirdly and more notably, Ambedkar was impulsively distrustful of most of the early Marathi communist leader who hailed from the educated higher class youth.<sup>(33)</sup>

#### IV.

Ambedkar's dislike to Marxism/ Communism is also evident from his advocacy of, and conversion to Buddhism. It may be recalled here that at the far end of his public life, he embraced Buddhism.<sup>(34)</sup> Before his conversion, in May 1956, he gave a talk entitled, 'Why I like Buddhism and how it is useful to the world in its present circumstances,' which was broadcast from the BBC, London. In that talk Ambedkar reasoned his keenness for Buddhism and accused Marxism / Communism of having 'shaken the religious system of all the countries'. To him, 'Buddhism was a complete answer to Marx and his communism.' For, 'Communism of the Russian type 'aimed at bringing it about 'by bloody revolution' while Buddhist Communism believed in 'bloodless revolution'<sup>(35)</sup>. Later, in an essay, 'Buddha or Karl Marx' (presumably written a few months before his death), Ambedkar made an effort to identify certain common grounds between Buddhism and Marxism/Communism, in order to justify his preference for the former. First of all, according to Ambedkar, Marxian notion of exploitation of the poor could be found in the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* (sorrow). Secondly, to him, both the Buddha and Marx thought private ownership of property brought ' power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation'. Thirdly, in his opinion, both of them considered that for the good of society it was necessary to remove sorrow by the abolition of private property. Despite these similarities, Ambedkar developed distrust for Marxism /Communism for two reasons. First, Marxism is an alien ideal. Secondly, it was based on the ideas of force, violence and democracy.<sup>(36)</sup> From the Marxian point of view, Ambedkar's

perception of Marxism /Communism while contradistinguishing it from Buddhism may be subjected to a close scrutiny. First, the similarities between the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* and Marxist notion of exploitation, are more apparent than real. For, to Buddha, the world was full of sorrow and that sorrow was common to all, the exploiter and the exploited alike. Therefore , instead of focusing attention on ‘class greed , the suffering engendered by the domination of one class over another the Buddha ‘spoke of greed in general , suffering and misery in general , and hence the path of human salvation pointed out by him was ‘also general’ and was ‘incapable of alleviating , much less removing altogether , the specific human suffering of a given social epoch. And property excepting the eight what is more, instead of fighting the oppressor the Buddha advised the oppressor ‘to eradicate impurity from within’. Truly, Buddha ‘did not touch upon the basic contradictions of feudal society, the contradiction between the small producer and exploiter of his labour, the prince and the merchant.’<sup>(37)</sup>

On the contrary, exploitation in the Marxian sense is used to refer to ‘the production and distribution of goods in societies where the mode of production provides a surplus over subsistence requirements’. In other words, exploiters are those ‘who acquire the benefits of production, in cash or in kind, by virtue of their control over tools, machines, land or raw materials necessary to production.’<sup>(38)</sup> Moreover, Marxism thinks it to be imperative to overthrow the system which generates such exploitation, by revolutionary means, instead of by appealing to the moral wisdom of the exploited in uprooting ‘impurity from within himself’.

Secondly, the Buddha’s efforts for abolition of private property were concerned only with the Buddhist *Bhikshus* who could not have private articles as prescribes by the rules of the *Bhikshu Sangh*. The articles were three robes of pieces of cloth for daily wear, a girdle for the lions, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle and a water strainer. Moreover, a Bhikshu was completely forbidden to receive gold or silver for the fear that with those two items he might buy something beside the stated eight articles he was permitted to have.<sup>(39)</sup> Thus, the Buddha as has been observed by Rahul Sankrityayan, tried to wipe out economic inequality for the monastic commune alone without removing its basic foundation in the society. What is more, even the rules stated above were flouted by his disciples after his death. Citing inscriptions at Sanchi and Bharhut, Rahul Sankrityayan had shown again that in the second century B.C., the monks and nuns ‘were already constructing pillars and railings with their private income, which meant that now they had other personal property apart from eight items of personal use’.<sup>(40)</sup> This fact seems to have escaped Ambedkar while making a comparative evaluation of Buddhism and Marxism on the issue of Private property.

It is to be noted that in the Marxist parlance, private property does not mean mere personal belonging but private ownership of, and control over, means of production, resulting in exploitation. Therefore, one should not see in the Buddha's contempt for private property 'more significant than it has,' as has been attributed to it by Ambedkar. As the renowned Marxist philosopher, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay point out, 'It [Buddha's condemnation of private property] is nothing, for example, comparable to the demand for the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production as an essential precondition for the positive emancipation of man, which is above all an emancipation from class exploitation and therefore possible only by the overthrow of class structure of society.'<sup>(41)</sup>

Thirdly, as against the accusation of Ambedkar that Marxism believed in dictatorship, it may be contended that Marx nowhere implied that the dictatorship of the proletariat would mean a dictatorship over the proletariat devoid of any element of democracy.<sup>(42)</sup> Contrarily, Ambedkar failed to note that notwithstanding the Buddha's preference for the political system of republic (*gana*), in the contemporary prosperous and powerful Lichhavi (*Vaishali*) republic' democracy existed only for those who belonged to the Lichhavi clan. The numerous slaves, who were movable property, had no place in that republic. Even the non-Lichhavi Brahmins or trader castes – though they were free – had no right to vote for the senate (*samsad*); they were at the mercy of Lichhavis.

In addition, not every one was permitted to get admission into the Buddhist order. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay has again drawn attention to a rule laid down in one of the Buddhist texts that no run away slave should be admitted into that order; a candidate had to testify whether he was a free man. In the same way, the soldiers who had deserted the army of the kings were denied admission into the *Bikshu Sangh*. Chattopadhyay thinks that laws like these apparently 'implied that Buddha would not have gone a long way against the vested interests.'<sup>(43)</sup> The position of women in the Buddhist order was even more deplorable. Sindhu S Dange argues that the Buddha permitted the women in the *Bhikshu Sangh* only at the instance of Anand, his disciple and considered them to be 'an obstacle in the way of achieving salvation.'

When Anand asked Buddha, "How should they behave with the ladies?" the Buddha replied, "Avoid their sight." Anand again asked, "If it is unavoidable, then?" The Buddha replied, you keep silence." Anand continued," If we talk to them ....?" The Buddha replied," that they should try to be *smriti-sampanna* (moral)."

Needless to say, as Dange concluded, the Buddha's attitude towards women was 'reactionary'.<sup>(44)</sup> Fourthly, on the issue of violence, it may be argued that despite his belief in non-violence, the

Buddha permitted even the use of force where the question of justice was concerned .As Buddha observed:

‘A man who fights for justice and safety cannot be accused of Ahimsa. If all the means of maintaining peace have failed then the responsibility for *Himsa* falls on him who starts war. One must never surrender to evil powers.’<sup>(45)</sup> Ambedkar was perhaps influenced by these teachings of the Buddha as he expressed his faith in the principle of *absolute non-violence as an end* and in *relative violence as a means*.<sup>(46)</sup> In his criticism of Gandhi’s idea of absolute non-violence, he maintained that although love and kindness towards all creatures was a part of the principle of *Abimsa*.

Marxism, on the other hand, never favors the application of violence for its own sake. It uses violence only as a repellent measure. Thus Herbert Apthekar concisely puts it, ‘where violence has accompanied revolutionary culmination, it has appeared because the old class , facing elimination due to social development , has chosen to postpone its internment by resorting to the violent suppression of the challenging classes and forces . In other word, reaction is the source of violence when it appears Resistance is offered in response to that challenge, and when it succeeds the revolutionary process comes fruition’<sup>(47)</sup>. Finally, the whole effort of Ambedkar to prove the superiority of Buddhism as an ideal, over Marxism, seems to be naive. For, the socio-political universe in which these two perspective world philosophies emerged was poles apart. The Buddha lived, and formulated his ideas, in a society which had been passing through a stage of transition from tribal democracy to feudalism. On the contrary, Marxism originated as an ideological reaction to the socio-economic demands of capitalism in its hey-day. If for the argument’s sake it is held that there is any similarity between the Buddhist communism and Marxism, it is in form at best, not in substance. As Debiprasad Chattopadhyay rightly comments: the Buddha ‘was not living in the modern world and as such his class affiliation cannot be judged by our contemporary standards.’<sup>(48)</sup> In the final analysis, it is evident that Ambedkar’s indictment of Marxism was guided by the logic of vulgarized and oversimplified version of that ideology. It seems that he had developed his views on Marxism by reading some tacky books on it, not the original works of the founding fathers of scientific socialism themselves. This is evident from the fact of his criticism of Marxism on ground of violence and dictatorship, which is reminiscent of hackneyed bourgeois and social democratic critiques of Marxism.

## V.

### Conclusions:

The above discussion leads us to conclude that though Ambedkar described his scheme of economic organization of the Indian society as state socialism, in view of its other features, we believe it appropriate to identify it democratic socialism. Moreover, collective farming, one of the major features of his model of democratic socialism, needs to be thoroughly reconsidered as it lacked viability. He accepted the concept of class struggle but he felt that in the Indian set up, it had to be substantially redefined and ascribed a similar agenda to the Buddha and agreed that one of the major contradictions of capitalism was the social basis of its production in contrast to private appropriation. He criticized Marxism for subscribing to economic determinism, for its inadequate grasp of liberal democracy, for its inability to adequately understand the realm of ideologies and for considering moral values as historically conditioned<sup>(49)</sup>. He found existing socialism as far practiced too authoritarian. His position need not be seen as his strong commitment to socialism but to a form of egalitarian liberalism wherein a socio-political order of equal liberties is upheld with a positive consideration towards the disadvantaged.

Ambedkar had identified himself with the most deprived and exploited section of Indian society. Thus, he castigated everything that inscribed poverty. For this, he was reluctant to recognize the traditional norms of bourgeois democracy and market economy. This motivated him to prescribe state socialism which aims to the eradication of poverty. But, at the same time it may be recounted that while accepting the reality of class exploitation, he refused to take note of its 'political revolutionary implications,' as he had no class programme. That is why he wanted the right to private property to remain sacrosanct,<sup>(50)</sup> and as such was reluctant to liquidate the moneyed class. It is somewhat inconceivable how he could achieve socialism by eliminating socio-economic inequality without undermining the basic economic foundation of society on which the system of inequality was founded. The inability to resolve this contradiction ultimately led Ambedkar to find solace in Buddhism, with an attempt to present its teachings 'in a new light to suit modern class realities'.<sup>(51)</sup> In fact, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a 'self-deception' and channeled the whole movement of workers and peasants led by him into 'reactionary and metaphysical conceptions'.<sup>(52)</sup> Thus, Eleanor Zelliott was absolutely right when she remarked that Ambedkar's embracing of a new religion was meant to act as a bulwark against communism.

In conclusion, Ambedkar's predisposition to state socialism within the orbit of the bourgeois liberal-democratic political framework and his antipathy toward Marxian socialism manifested itself in the best tradition of Fabianism.

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