



DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON LAND REFORM AND THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is one of the most important personalities in the Indian history whose work for social justice, mainly for marginalised community, is even today being remembered. He remained an important proponent of land reform, and agricultural matters in relation to addressing the socio-economic imbalances that existed in pre independent India. This social injustice was further manifested in economic injustice in the exploitative landownership patterns and the Zamindari system strengthened it (Ambedkar, 1993). There was a strong focus on land redistribution by such arrangements which were to liberate Dalits and the backward classes from the clutches of intermediaries in land dealing and get them equitable land rights to a means of livelihood and economic dependence.

He also began speaking about the importance of state intervention in agriculture, supporting modern techniques and the provision of land, water and other resources to dispossessed communities and cooperative farming. His vision was one of true social and economic justice which would be made possible through the empowerment of the agricultural sector, the backbone of India's economy.

Arun Kumar and I have tried to actively critique Ambedkar's land reform ideas and its relevance in contemporary Indian political economy. It evaluates how his advocacy has affected land reform policies, the agrarian sector, and Dalit empowerment. The paper also examines challenges surrounding implementation of his vision, and lessons for future reform. Dr Ambedkar's dedication to social justice guides India's agricultural and land reform debate.

Keywords: *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Land Reform, Agricultural Sector, Dalit Empowerment, Social Justice.*

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Introduction:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the person who was the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, was instrumental in changing the socio-economic and political landscape of the Indian sub-continent. While Ambedkar is widely respected as a champion for the

needed reforms that would benefit those who were so often treated as "lower caste," Ambedkar also spoke out for land reform and against the oppressive tactics of India's agrarian and caste systems. Ambedkar wanted to dismantle the terrible inequalities in India's agrarian economy — where a few dominated vast



tracts of land while the majority, particularly Dalits and marginalised communities, lived in dire poverty and were exploited.

Land reforms, especially after independent ,were crucial for socio-economic transformation in India. Widely the livelihood of at least 60 percent of 1.3 billion people in India, agriculture, in turn, was hampered by the colonial-era land tenure system that has kept the rural poor, particularly untouchables, socially and economically dependent and oppressed. Ambedkar understood that dispossession from the land has historically disempowered rural poor and land-reforms are critical for subaltern empowerment and equitable distribution of resources. He opposed Zamindari system, made case for land redistribution and state involvement to promote agrarian growth.

The current paper aims to do a critical evaluation of Dr. Ambedkar's views on land reforms and its implication on agriculture. It discusses how his ideas could counter the economic disparity and usher in social justice and examines the present-day relevance of his perspectives in the context of contemporary land reforms and agricultural policies in India.

Some History of Land Reforms in India:

The agriculture sector in India was governed by an exploitative and deeply unequal land tenure structure before 1947, when the country gained independence. The government pursued its economic policies which further consolidated land ownership among few, economically disenfranchising much of the Indian population — especially the peasantry and agriculture labourers. The zamindari system — where zamindars collected land revenue on behalf of the British — furthered this inequality. The zamindars controlled vast acres of land, while the peasants laboured in exploitative conditions, often in a debt trap. In this system of land ownership, landowners were at the top of the hierarchy, with tenants and labourers at the bottom level, trapped in a cycle of poverty and

exploitation.

Ownership of land was incredibly concentrated, with huge swathes of agriculture owned by a few landowners. The consequence was that most of the farmers had no direct control over the land on which they worked, and most of the produce was used to pay rents or taxes to their zamindars, leading to large socio-economic differences. Furthermore, the agrarian tenurial system, which was ubiquitous in many parts of rural India, compounded the misery of the indigent. Sharecropping and other status of tenancy put farmers in unfair agreements that made them vulnerable to exploitation, denying the status of economic independence.

These inequities spurred the emergence of the need for land reforms in post-independence India. It started with the newly independent government wanting to abolish feudal land ownership and redistribute land to the landless and marginalized groups. Land reforms were aimed at achieving proper distribution of land, increasing productivity and reducing socio-economic inequalities. Meanwhile, many like Ambedkar argued that land redistribution was essential for the lower castes to earn their share of social justice. Land reform was considered part of shaking off the hold of economic exploitation and boosting, development in India's primarily agrarian economy.

Agrarian Reform from the Straws of Ambedkar:

For instance, he had criticized the Zamindari system, which was common before independence, as exploitative. He called the system a »one of the major instruments of social & economic exploitation in rural India. Zamindars, as intermediaries between the British colonial government and the peasants, were granted extensive control over land under this system, often without any cultivation of their own. Peasants had to make their lively hood under severe conditions the taxes imposed on them were out of the question. The Zamindari system, according to Ambedkar, is



exploitative in nature and a breeder of both material and social inequalities. He argued that this system robbed peasants of their livelihoods and subjected them to brutal social and economic subjugation.

It is here that Ambedkar took cognizance of land as a key site of social stratification, and more importantly, as a mechanism for caste-based exploitation. In rural areas, the caste system involved the upper castes, such as zamindars or landlords, that owned land and the lower castes, especially Dalits, who became landless workers. Ambedkar viewed this division as a fundamental tool of caste-based oppression, through which lower castes were denied economic autonomy and social dignity. Land, then, became a marker of power, and its concentration in the hands of a select class of people entrenched the caste system's inflexible structures.

Ambedkar advocating for land reforms, which issued a call for land redistribution particularly between the landless and the upper caste. He called for the dissolution of intermediaries (zamindars), who he saw as parasites feeding off the agrarian economy. He imagined a direct system where there would be no exploitation, land would be owned and farmed directly by those who worked the land. Ambedkar was also of the opinion that the state must intervene in the agricultural sector and push for land reforms: the state must be a vital actor in pushing for their implementation and in going the extra mile to assist the rural poor. He placed the blame for India's backwardness on the feudal system, which failed to empower dispossessed denizens and demanded that the state intervene to dismantle said feudal system and fortify the industrial class instead.

Ambedkar's Advocacy for the Agricultural Sector:

Ambedkar acknowledged the importance of the agriculture sector to achieve the economic development and social justice of India. Being the fulcrum of the Indian economy, agriculture had been

the predominant livelihood for the vast majority of the population, particularly in rural areas. Ambedkar insisted an organised, fair agricultural industry is the cornerstone for a nation, and without that, nothing could be established. Yet he noticed how the farmers, particularly from marginalized communities, were taken advantage of and it acted as a barrier in the growth of the agricultural sector and maintained social and economic disparities. Ambedkar emphasized that land reforms and equal availability to economic resources are fundamental for development as well as socio-political justice.

Land rights — for Dalits and backward classes — were the crux of Ambedkar's vision for agricultural reform. He considered land ownership a crucial step for lower castes—most of whom were landless and relied on upper-caste landlords for their livelihood—to attain economic independence and social dignity. Ambedkar argued that giving rights to land to these oppressed classes would empower them not only as an economic class but also challenge the social ordering of caste which enforced oppression of different groups of people. For Ambedkar, land was not merely an economic resource; but rather, it was a means for attaining social equality and unshackling oneself from generations of exploitation.

As such, Dr. Ambedkar supported cooperative farming and communitarian agriculture as a solution to the inequalities engendered by the agricultural system. He argued that it promised to create more equitable distribution of land and resources while building solidarity among farmers. Such a model would also lessen reliance on intermediaries, and farms would find themselves with better bargaining power.

Moreover, Ambedkar advocated for modernization of agriculture through scientific experimentation with state support. He realized that productivity in agriculture could only be improved using modern

methods, irrigation and technology. He said that the state needs to be actively engaged in providing infrastructure, financial help and education for farmers, especially from less privileged communities, to facilitate their transition into more resourceful and productive agricultural practices.

A Critical Harsh Appraisal of Ambedkar's Land Reform Views:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's land reform ideas were disruptive, including a complete overhaul of the exploitative agriculture system. But to judge the operational applicability of his views in modern India we must have a decent idea of the political, social and economic matrix of his time and that of today. Today's socio-environmental issues of agrarian stress, landless farmers, labour exploitation and concentration of land in few hands — that continuance of the caste structure in the field system — resonate with Ambedkar's vision of land redistribution, abolition of intermediate production relationship in land, and public domain in agriculture. The lack of such reforms, however, is politically sensitive, as current regimes balance between the rich landowners and the poor farmers in rural areas, combining the power of both under political infiltration and a lack of infrastructure for agriculture. In the contemporary Indian state, while land institution reforms have been attempted, they have frequently been ineffective or maladministered because land factionalism (this refers to the splitting of lands into smaller units) and ineffective land reallocation and regulatory enforcement remain issues.

On comparing Ambedkar's ideas with land reforms implemented by post-independent leadership, we find a gulf between his vision and implementation. The zamindari abolition and land ceiling acts were there; these were towards what Ambedkar was thinking, but it was only partially successful in giving land to the landless. Even though redistributive laws were in

place, the current socio-political structures often undermined their impact. Some examples included lack of legal framework, corruption, the influence of strong landlords leading to disability of these policies. Ambedkar's land-reform proposals, too, met with resistance in his time. A lot of his ideas proved difficult to implement due to the reluctance of the political leadership to counter feudal structures, the economic dependence of the state on landowners and opposition from the upper castes. In fact, initial critiques of Ambedkar's vision of industrialisation highlight that the platforms he points towards do not consider many of the complexities involved in post-independence agrarian life, for instance, the pressures of technology or the global economy [19]. His emphasis on land redistribution was criticized for being too narrowly focused on that one aspect of rural, and indeed many argue for a broader approach to rural development including agricultural modernization or generation of rural employment.

Lesson from Ambedkar underpinned agrarian system in New India:

In modern history, Land Reform has emerged as an important aspect of Development Policies in India, largely underpinned by the driving ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. His support of land redistribution, the elimination of intermediaries, and state intervention in agriculture formed the basis for later agrarian reforms in post-independence India. His focus on land rights for underprivileged sections of society, particularly Dalits and backward classes, built a crucial framework of the land reform movement in the country. Ambedkar's ideals of land reforms to uplift the marginalised sections of society significantly influenced post-independent land laws, such as abolishing zamindari systems and instituting land ceiling laws. While these reforms were partially implemented, Ambedkar's goals of total land redistribution and equality in land ownership is still an



unfinished agenda.

Ambedkar's advocacy for land rights was integral to Dalit empowerment and agrarian justice. In placing an emphasis on equitable land distribution, Ambedkar aimed to disrupt the cycle of caste-based exploitation that heavily impacted the Dalit and marginalised communities of India. It was able to guarantee economic independence, dignity, and social equality for the Dalits through the access to land. He went on to influence some aspects of social justice movements, and land reform, where plots of land are transferred to historically oppressed communities to prove economic opportunities. The importance of Ambedkar's ideas on land rights can be observed in the recent discussions on land reforms and the necessity of including the marginalized in the process.

As you think through his thoughts, the status of land reforms and agriculture in India today shows mixed results. Although there are legal systems of land redistribution, they are not effectively implemented, and land is still concentrated in the hands of a few. Some of the major challenges in the agrarian sector like insufficient irrigation coverage, insufficient access to modern farming technologies and increasing farmer indebtedness. The need for state intervention in that direction, as envisaged by Ambedkar, holds valid even today, but now the focus is not just on land reforms, but also on rural development, financial assistance for the disadvantaged farmers and their empowerment.

Conclusion:

These views were part of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's broader vision of social justice, economic equality, and the upliftment of disadvantaged sections of society. Described zamindari system as a major cause of social inequity and caste-based exploitation in rural India. He believed these structural inequalities could be addressed via land redistribution, abolition of intermediaries and increased intervention by the state,

along the lines of the state monopoly on land as stated by Karl Marx, especially for Dalits and backward classes. He also advocated for scientific methods, cooperative farming and rural improvements to modernise agriculture.

Ambedkar's perspectives on land reform resonate even today, more so considering the continuous crisis that Indian agriculture has been facing. Even so, rural areas still face issues such as land concentration, exploitation and poverty that defeated the purpose of the post-independence reforms. Overall, Ambedkar's demand for land redistribution remains at the forefront of the debates about agrarian reform in contemporary India with important social justice implications, particularly about ensuring access to essential resources for marginalized communities.

Dr. Ambedkar's vision provides a roadmap to bridge the entrenched inequalities of rural India. Land rights and equitable distribution: These will be central to shaping agricultural policies of the future. Ambedkar continued to do this even while he was in the background writing his constitutions and bringing together ideas and his alternate vision for the actors in this scene — he was bringing together land, agrarian reforms in terms of economic justice, political justice, social justice, not just for a select few, but for all citizens.

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