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ROLE OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR IN NATIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT POLICY

Mr. Siddhant Jagdish Jadhav

Assistant professor (Economics)

Siddharth College of Art's, Science & Commerce,

Fort, Mumbai-01,Buddha Bhavan.

Abstract:

Water is an important natural resource for the economic, agricultural, industrial, and social development of any nation. Water management was a concern in India even before independence, but Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar explained the importance of water management in the development of the nation. As the first Law Minister of independent India, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar contributed a lot in the legal framework for water policy, irrigation development multi-purpose river projects, and equitable distribution.

This research paper gives special information about Dr. Ambedkar's vision and contribution to the Indian water management policy. Establishment of the Central Water Commission. Planning of the Damodar Basin Project. Hirakud Dam. Other irrigation development schemes. This paper also reflects his vision of inter-state water disputes and the concept of river interlinking. This study compares Ambedkar's water management ideas with the current situation of inter-state disputes in India's water crisis and their challenges in sustainable water governance.

This research focuses on the socio-economic impact of water scarcity on agriculture and the affected communities, especially Dalit, tribal, and rural populations, who face the worst water scarcity. This research provides valuable suggestions for implementing Ambedkar's approach to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. The research concludes that Dr. Ambedkar was the inspiration for modern Indian water management. His integrated approach, combining legal, economic, and technical solutions, provides a guiding framework for solving contemporary water problems.

Keywords: *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Water Policy, Inter-State River Disputes, Central Water Commission (CWC), Social Justice, Irrigation, Sustainable Development, Dalit Empowerment, Water Governance, Multipurpose River Projects*

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Introduction:

Babasaheb is known as the architect of the Indian Constitution, but his contribution is not limited to the Constitution alone. He has proposed ideas and taken revolutionary decisions in many areas. One of the important areas is water management and public policy.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Between 1942 and 1945, this project was aimed at sharing water resources equally by linking rivers across the country, reducing the impact of drought and floods, and increasing hydroelectricity generation. He has also included important provisions related to water in the Indian Constitution. On July 20, 1942, Babasaheb was

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appointed as the Minister of Labor on the Viceroy's Executive Council and was given the responsibility of the Irrigation and Power departments. He studied these departments in depth and proposed many measures for the effective management of water resources. During this time, he also played an important role in projects like the Damodar Project, Hirakud Dam, and Son River Project. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar framed the Inter-State Water Disputes Act under Article 262 of the Constitution so that if a dispute arises between two or more states over water, the Central Government can adjudicate it. In 1956, the River Basin Authority Act was enacted on the basis of the Act, so that the management of the water resources of the rivers could be done in a more planned and fair manner. In a conference held in Cuttack in 1945, Babasaheb proposed the use of flood water for irrigation. The River Basin Authority Act was enacted, so that the water resources of the rivers could be managed in a more planned and judicious manner. In a conference held in Cuttack in 1945, Babasaheb presented his views on how flood water could be used for irrigation, water supply, and hydroelectric power generation. He said that instead of considering water and floods as destructive, they should be properly utilized. He suggested that dams should be built at various places on the rivers and excess water should be blocked so that it could not be released into the sea and used for agriculture, drinking, and industries. Babasaheb implemented the Damodar Basin Project in India on the lines of the Tennis Heave Basin Project in America. He took the advice of American experts instead of English experts because the rivers and their management in America were more compatible with the conditions in India. Under his leadership, the Damodar Valley Corporation was established, which enabled flood control, hydroelectric power generation, and water supply for agriculture in Bihar and West Bengal. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not only see water as a resource, but he was a symbol of social equality. In 1927, he led a significant struggle for the untouchables to gain equal rights to water during the Chavdar Talya Satyagraha in Mahad. This struggle was not just for show but for social justice and equality. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision of population policy is still a guide for India. The concept of fair distribution of water resources that he proposed, the provisions made for inter-state water disputes, and the effective use of flood water have given a new direction to the country's water management even today If India implements the river linking project and water resources management as per Babasaheb's vision, it can be of great help in resolving the country's water problems. The water policy formulated by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for India reflects his vision and comprehensive thinking of society. Keeping in mind this important work of his, his contribution will definitely inspire the next generation.

Historical Background of Water Policy in Indian:

Colonial Era Water Governance :

The roots of water policy in India can be seen in the colonial period, where water management was primarily based on the economic interests of the British administration. During British rule, the main focus was on building large-scale canal irrigation systems to increase agricultural production and increase land revenue collection. These irrigation works, such as the Upper Ganga Canal and the Godavari Delta System, were the largest in the world at that time, but they were not designed for equitable development or regional balance.

The colonial watershed lacked integration and long-term planning. Projects were developed in isolation, often without considering the environmental or social needs of the region they served. The benefits of these irrigation systems were mostly concentrated in selected fertile regions, leaving large parts of the

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country, especially tribal and drought-prone areas, neglected. Local water traditions such as tank irrigation, step wells, and rainwater harvesting were also neglected, leading to the decline of community-based water management practices.

The British also introduced a legal and administrative framework that led to the commercialization of water, bringing it under the control of the states and violating traditional rights. This led to centralized decision-making and excluded local communities from managing their water resources. Thus, the colonial approach prioritized profit and control over sustainable and social organization.

Post-Independence Vision under Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :

After independence, India began to move away from the exploitative colonial legacy and came under the leadership of visionaries like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. While serving as a working member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1942 to 1946, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was entrusted with the responsibility of water and power development. He considered water as a national resource important for economic development. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's approach to water policy was rooted in scientific and institutional planning. He laid great emphasis on the multipurpose development of rivers, irrigation, hydropower as well as natural disasters such as flood control and integration of drinking water supply. From his point of view, he realized that water and national development, mainly agriculture and industrial development, are interdependent. He advocated central coordination of water resources to avoid regional disputes and ensure equitable distribution for all.

One of his major contributions was to lay the foundation for large river basin projects like the Damodar Basin and the Hirakud Project. He introduced the concept of integrated river basin development. The development of the entire basin of a river is done collectively and in a coordinated manner, in which the mainstream of the river, its tributaries, water resources, groundwater, environmental factors, agriculture, industry, water supply, water pollution control, and local population are considered simultaneously and in the same planning process. That is, Babasaheb also added social justice to water management. The water right is a fundamental right and an important tool for the upliftment of the community.

Finally, although the colonial water administration was fragmented and profit-based, after independence, from Babasaheb's perspective, and under his leadership, it focused on holistic scientific and national development and social equity.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Contribution to Water Management:

1. **Inter-State Water Disputes: Legal Framework**

   One of Dr. Ambedkar's greatest contributions was the framing of Article 262 of the Constitution, which granted Parliament the power to resolve disputes related to the use, distribution, and control of interstate river water. Additionally, Parliament has the authority to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court or any other court in such cases.

   While institutionalizing a framework for resolving water disputes, Ambedkar aimed to eliminate regional conflicts and ensure that national interests were not overshadowed. His goal was to maintain federal unity within the legal system, especially when dealing with communal resources such as rivers.

2. **Establishing the Central Water Commission (CWC)**

   Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in reorganizing the Central Waterways Irrigation and Navigation Commission into the Central Water Commission (CWC) in 1945. This organization was instrumental in bringing about a shift towards a

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scientific and technical approach to the management of water resources in India.

Under Ambedkar's guidance, the CWC was tasked with the design, control and implementation of irrigation and flood control schemes in the country. This central organization was responsible for developing water use standards, verifying hydrological data and liaising with states involved in major water scheme projects.

3. **Multipurpose River Valley Projects**

Influenced by the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the USA, Ambedkar recommended multipurpose river valley projects in India. These served more than one purpose irrigation, generation of electricity, control of floods, and navigation.

Some of the leading projects that he encouraged included:

- Damodar Valley Project (West Bengal/ Jharkhand)
- Hirakud Dam (Odisha)
- Bhakra-Nangal Project (Himachal Pradesh/ Punjab)

These projects of infrastructure altered local economies, aided agricultural development and prepared the ground for industrial growth.

4. **Irrigation and Hydropower Policy**

Ambedkar considered irrigation essential in changing India from a famine-ridden to a food-sufficient country. He stressed the storage of water by reservoirs and effective irrigation canals for ensuring cultivation throughout the year. Additionally, he favored hydroelectric power generation as a clean and renewable source of energy, crucial for industrialization.

5. **Industrial Water Allocation Role**

Realizing the connection between water supply and industrial development, Dr. Ambedkar envisioned industrial areas with stable water facilities. His vision was visionary, considering that economic corridors needed integrated water-energy-resource planning.

India's current water crisis:

India is a country with large rivers, monsoon reservoirs and large dams. Yet, India is facing a major water crisis today. After independence, the government brought in three National Water Policies – in 1987, 2002 and 2012. The aim of these policies was to improve water management, ensure proper use of water and increase public participation. These policies sought to implement Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), set reasonable water tariffs and protect the environment. But these policies have not been successful enough in practice, and the country's water situation has worsened. Agricultural states like Punjab and Haryana are drawing down groundwater (underground water) on a large scale, which could lead to water shortages in the future.

Large cities like Delhi and Bengaluru face frequent water shortages due to poor water planning, poor infrastructure and reckless use of water. Apart from that, there are ongoing conflicts between several states over the Cauvery, Krishna and Mahanandi rivers, which have turned into political disputes. This shows that our legal system and water allocation planning are not working effectively.

Also, water policies are being undermined by pollution. Many factories and households discharge sewage directly into the rivers. This has polluted rivers like the Yamuna and the Ganges and made their water unsafe for human consumption. Despite the government’s massive sanitation campaigns, the problem is still huge.

Climate change is also a major factor. The amount of rainfall is increasing, the snow peaks of the Himalayas are melting, and floods are increasing in some areas and droughts in others. This is making India’s water problem even worse.

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Contemporary Challenges in India's Water Management:

1. **Growing demand and low water supply**
   India is home to about 18% of the world's population, but we have only 4% of the fresh water available. The agricultural sector uses the most, about 80%. The old flood irrigation method is still used in many places, due to which a lot of water is wasted. At the same time, the water demand of cities and factories is increasing day by day. This puts a lot of pressure on the limited water. Considering this need and supply gap, people have started relying more on groundwater, which is also often extracted in the wrong way or in the wrong way.
2. **Water disputes between states**
   Water sources often pass through two or more states. The dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka for the Cauvery River is an example of this. There are laws and tribunals to resolve such disputes, but their decisions are not made on time, and sometimes those decisions are not even implemented. These disputes are exacerbated by politics and lack of proper understanding between states.
3. **Challenges due to climate change**
   India's water management is dependent on rainfall, but now the amount of rainfall has become uncertain due to climate change. For example, the snow in the Himalayas is melting rapidly, there are continuous droughts in some places and major floods in others. The drought in Marathwada is an example of this. In such a situation, agriculture and the livelihood of rural people are greatly affected. Events like the 2013 floods in Uttarakhand have shown us the importance of being prepared for climate change.
4. **Weak governance and challenges in implementing plans**
   We have many institutions in water management, but their work is not interconnected. For example, the Central Water Commission (CWC) and the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) work independently of each other. This prevents the plans from being implemented properly. Moreover, corruption, lack of proper supervision and political interference often lead to the failure of even the best plans.

Solutions to Modern Water Problems – Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Perspective:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had very thoughtful and far-sighted solutions on water management. Ambedkar's views on the serious water problem that India is facing today are very useful and timely. He emphasized on law, technology and equality in society.

1. **Legal reforms and strengthening of institutions**
   Babasaheb always spoke about the need for clear and strict laws on water. He suggested that there should be independent courts or committees for inter-state water disputes, which would give decisions within a certain time frame and all states would have to accept those decisions. Also, the institutions that manage water – such as the Central Water Commission – need to be updated with new technology, which includes GIS maps, live data, and AI-based forecasting.
2. **Local and participatory governance**
   Ambedkar believed that the benefits of water schemes should reach the common and backward communities. He emphasized on local people's participation. As happened in the village of Hiware Bazar in Maharashtra – there, people came together to plan water properly, increase the catchment area and make the village self-sufficient in terms of water. In this way, if the gram panchayats are involved in water planning, the local people themselves will take responsibility.

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3. **Rethinking traditional methods**
   Ambedkar had also asked to use traditional knowledge. Old methods – like the baoli (water well) in Rajasthan or the phad irrigation system in Maharashtra – are designed according to traditional and local needs. These methods are environmentally friendly and sustainable, and can be reused with new technologies.
4. **Equality as a central concept**
   Babasaheb put forward the position that the state should control natural resources and use them for the benefit of all. According to him, the poor, Dalits, tribals and people living in slums should get drinking water and water for agriculture first. That is, the consideration of equality in water policies is essential.

Policy Recommendations Inspired by Ambedkar's Vision:

1. **Strengthening water authorities at the central and state levels**
   There should be proper coordination between the center and the state for water management. The Ministry of Jal Shakti should collect all the information and make timely decisions and work together in times of disaster.
2. **Equal right to water for all**
   The poor and backward castes and tribes should be given priority in water planning. Water should be distributed not only on the basis of population but also on the basis of who needs it most.
3. **Sustainable projects for linking rivers**
   Dr. Ambedkar considered justice and protection of nature as important along with development. Therefore, the rights of the local people, environment and livelihood should be considered while doing river linking projects.
4. **Village-level water administration**
   If gram panchayats are given funds and training, they can manage drinking water, recycling and irrigation in a better way. The Jal Nidhi project in Kerala is a good example.
5. **Use of technology**
   Drip and sprinkler irrigation systems save water. Smart water meters and satellites can monitor water usage and increase transparency in urban areas.
6. **Special schemes for Dalits and tribals**
   It is necessary to provide water supply, water tanks and borewells in slums and backward areas. Mission Bhagirath scheme in Telangana is a good example for this.
7. **Formulate laws for groundwater**
   Laws are needed to control the use of groundwater. Maharashtra has some such laws, but they need to be implemented properly at the local level.
8. **Transparent private-public partnerships**
   Private companies can be involved in water projects, but everything should be transparent. Citizen information and auditing can prevent misuse and corruption.

Conclusion:

The water crisis in India is not limited to water scarcity but is related to inequality, weak governance and lack of comprehensive planning. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision is not limited to history but is a strong guide based on justice, equality and sustainability. He said that the state should be considered as a trustee of the people, and that it should focus on the needy and marginalized, and that everyone should participate in the water system. In today's times, the demand for water is increasing and environmental problems are also increasing. In such a situation, adopting Ambedkar's thoughts can lead to a more equitable and secure future for water, where access to clean water is considered a fundamental right for every Indian.

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