

SOCIAL THOUGHTS OF LENIN AND AMBEDKAR

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on social thoughts of Lenin and Ambedkar. It engages with their thoughts on religion, culture, morality and education. Religion, culture, morality and education have been historically determining factors in social life of human civilisation. Every society has its own social institutions, moral values and educational system and varies according to these institutions. However these institutions are not static and stagnant. It changes according to the social revolutions and changes. On the questions of religion, culture, morality and education, Lenin and Ambedkar share almost similar approach with some differences that are imposed by their respective social conditions. Both considered religion a major means of social oppression. While Lenin understood religion and culture a part of superstructure which are shaped by the economic structure of the society, Ambedkar found these two as determining factors or base that regulate the social institutions and peoples psychologies as well as material economic social relations. For Lenin, the revolutionary culture and morality is directly linked with the question of class struggle, while Ambedkar understood Buddhism as a means to social transformation and the source of revolutionary culture and morality. Both of them emphasised the need of education for social revolution and considered education as a means as well as an end. The social thoughts of Lenin and Ambedkar is deeply guided and shaped with the vision of transforming the society with higher moral values, culture and ethics.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Morality, Education, Oppression, Social Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Lenin was a philosopher, and revolutionary who led the anti-class Bolshevik revolution in Russia and established socialism. Lenin was influenced by the thought of Karl Marx and Engels who advocated the theory of scientific socialism and proletariat violent revolution with the philosophy of historical

materialism and dialectical materialism. Lenin emerged as a revolutionary leader in a period when the Czarist Russia was going through acute socio-political and economic crisis because of the First World War. Taking advantage of the condition, Lenin led the Bolshevik revolution in October, 1917 and established dictatorship of the workers party. Similarly, B. R. Ambedkar emerged as a philosopher, revolutionary and constitution maker who led the

historic anti-caste struggle and new democratic social revolution in India. Ambedkar dedicated his entire life fighting for the cause of untouchables, women and other oppressed section of Indian society. India the land of Caste witnessed a prolonged struggle against caste in the history starting from Buddha to Ambedkar. Tukaram, Guru Ravidas, Bhim Bhoi, Iyothee Thass, Jyotirao Phule, Sabitribai Phule are some of the social revolutionaries who waged a relentless struggle against caste based social exploitation. Ambedkar was the product of that revolutionary legacy who was deeply influenced by the thoughts of Tukaram, Jyotirao Phule and Buddha.

Lenin and Ambedkar contributed significantly on the ideas of social transformation and various aspects of social life such as class, caste, religion, culture, morality, politics, economy, etc. This study focus on Lenin and Ambedkar thoughts on religion, culture, morality and education. Religion, culture, morality and education have been historically determining factors in social life of human civilisation. Every society has its own social institutions and moral standards and educational system and it varies according to these institutions. However these institutions are not static and stagnant. It changes according to the social revolutions and changes. Religion, culture, morality and educational system have undergone changes throughout the world according to the social transformations and revolutions. Old social institutions and moral ethics get replaced by the new one. This study focused on how Lenin and Ambedkar perceived these institutions and provides an alternative towards the social transformation.

ON RELIGION

Lenin strongly advocated religion as one of the form of spiritual oppression of people by the ruling class. Lenin pointed that the vast masses of slaves or working class are exploited by the tiny minority of feudal landlords or capitalists and in order to keep these masses in perpetual suffering the oppressor created religion to divert their attention towards

their fate and "God". He made religion as private affair in USSR, but he did not apply it to the party (Lenin 1965).

Lenin like Marx considered Religion as the opium for the people. According to Lenin, the economic oppression of the workers inevitably brings every kind of political oppression and social humiliation, which is responsible for the darkening of spiritual and moral life of the masses (Lenin 1965:83-87). Lenin considered Religion as one of the forms of spiritual oppression which falls down heavily upon the masses everywhere. Lenin mentioned that the impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the oppressors inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death as the impotence of the ancient people in their battle with nature gave rise to belief in gods, devils, miracles and others. Lenin rejected religion on the ground that those who toil and live in poverty all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient on earth to take comfort life in heaven, but those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practice charity (Lenin 1965). Lenin pointed that the modern class-conscious worker reared by large-scale factory undermines the religious prejudices and tries to seek a better life for himself here on earth. To Lenin, the proletariat are in favour of socialism that takes science in the battle against the religion. This makes the workers free from their belief in life after death by binding them together to fight in the present for a better life on earth (Lenin 1973: 402-413).

Lenin demanded that religion must be declared a private affair. But he did not consider religion a private affair as far as his Party was concerned. He made it private affair so far as the state is concerned. According to him, religion will not have any connection with the state. One can profess any religion or no religion as atheist. He declared that any kind of discrimination on the basis of religion would be intolerable in Bolshevik government. Lenin abolished the practice of mentioning citizen's religion in official documents. He declared that subsidies and services would be provided neither to the church nor to any religious

institution. He advocated complete separation of religion from the state.

Similarly, Ambedkar also rejected the concept of god and god centred religion. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism as scientific religion to counter Brahmanism. In his article, *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India*, Ambedkar mentioned that Buddhism practices communism long before the origin of Marxism (Ambedkar 1987, vol. 3). Ambedkar pointed that religion in India is the source of power for a class to exploit other class. He declared that Hinduism is responsible for the whole degradation of people in India (Ambedkar 2014).

Ambedkar's views on religion are quite different from the view of Lenin. Ambedkar did not consider religion as only the spiritual oppression. He pointed that religion is responsible for the social and material exploitation. To Ambedkar, religion is directly responsible for the socio-political and economic exploitation. He found religion determining oppressors and oppressed hereditarily. He witnessed religion determining people's social status and privileges. Religion has made people untouchable, unapproachable and degraded. It has divided the working class or proletariat with graded inequality preventing them to create a common front against the oppressors. Therefore Ambedkar approach on religion differs with the views of the Lenin and Marx. India, the land of caste and Brahmanism has a bitter history of class struggle in the form of religion. Ambedkar found how religion in India has been the root cause of exploitation, determined almost everything since some thousand years. He considered religion as an important means of social exploitation. According to Ambedkar, Brahmanism has been the sole means of exploitation at the hands of oppressors. Ambedkar considered religion like Buddhism as a means of emancipation at the hand of oppressed people to counter the hegemonic exploitative religion. Therefore Ambedkar did not consider all religion as the opium of the masses like Marx and Lenin. Ambedkar pointed that the history of Indian society is the history of conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism to

counter Hinduism and to unite the whole oppressed classes under a single platform. But he rejected the idea of god and extra human power. Ambedkar adopted Buddhism as political philosophy to fight against injustice and exploitation in order to establish a society of equality, liberty and fraternity.

LENIN AND AMBEDKAR ON MORALITY

Lenin rejected the bourgeois propaganda which held the view that communists have no morality, considering this as an attempt at throwing dust in the eyes of the workers and peasants. Lenin was of the view that communist do have ethics and morality. He pointed that communist ethics is not based on extra-class and extra-human concepts that maintains inequality and perpetuate exploitation in society. Extra-human morality is a construction of the reactionaries for the exploitation of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists (Lenin 1962). According to Lenin, communist morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle for a radical transformation of society. He pointed that the communist morality origins from the interests of the proletarian class struggle.

Lenin strongly rejected the morality based on god. Old society created the god oriented morality which allowed the exploitation of all the workers and peasants by the landowners and capitalists. Peasants and workers have been divided and exploited since generations by the landowners and capitalists. Lenin declared that to destroy the system of feudalism and capitalism the unity of the oppressed is required and that is something God cannot do. Therefore he said that the morality that stands outside human society is a fraud (Lenin 1962). While relating morality to the class struggle, Lenin said, class struggle means the overthrowing and abolishing the exploiters. The class struggle is continuing and it is the task of a revolutionary to subordinate all interests to that struggle. To him, morality is something which serves to destroy the old exploiting society uniting all the working people

around the proletariat to establish a new communist society. Lenin's morality is based on the struggle to unite the whole working people against exploitation, against all petty private property responsible for the inequality and subjugation (Lenin 1972).

On the other hand, Ambedkar also rejected the idea of eternal morality following the principle of Buddhism as everything is subjected to change in this material world according to the Buddha. Ambedkar's concept of morality is based on the principle of equality, liberty and fraternity. He rejected the kind of morality which is at the cost of individual or social liberty, freedom and human dignity. According to Ambedkar, the Hindu morality is caste morality. In his book, "*Annihilation of Caste*", Ambedkar pointed that in Indian society, virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. Ambedkar's concept of morality is also entirely subordinated to the interest of annihilation of caste and peoples struggle against injustice, inequality, discrimination and exploitation of man by man, community by community and nation by nation. Ambedkar morality is based on the struggle to annihilate caste and class to establish a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity.

Ambedkar talks about the constitutional morality. In the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar had to emphasize upon the constitutional morality to check the influence of caste on the working of government. On November 4, 1948, while moving the Draft of Constitution in the Assembly Ambedkar referred Grote to highlight the importance of constitutional morality. He emphasizes on the diffusion of constitutional morality for the peaceful working of the democratic constitution (Ambedkar 2014). While emphasising the need of constitutional morality, Ambedkar discussed two things interconnected with which are not generally recognized. One is that the form of administration and other is the form of the Constitution. He mentioned that it is perfectly possible to pervert the Constitution by changing its form of administration and to make it inconsistent and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution. Ambedkar adopted Buddhism to fight the perverted caste ridden oppressive morality.

On the question of morality, both Lenin and Ambedkar do not differ much. Both subordinate morality to the struggle for equality and fighting against exploitation, discrimination and humiliation. The difference is that Ambedkar considered Buddhism as the source of morality while Lenin left it entirely to the class struggle. However the programme of Buddhism for Ambedkar is a matter of caste-class struggle to annihilate inequality and oppression.

ON CULTURE

Lenin recognized the existence of two kinds of culture in society. One is the hegemonic exploitative reactionary culture of the ruling classes and the other is the revolutionary progressive culture of the oppressed classes. These cultures are always in conflict because of the ongoing class struggle. He advocated proletarian class culture, theorized by Karl Marx for the larger transformation of the whole society. Lenin identified proletariat class culture as a consciousness of the proletariat for making a classless society and ending exploitation by the means of violent revolution and dictatorship of proletariat (Lenin 1965:316-317, vol. 31). Therefore, he pointed that all educational work should be mixed with the spirit of the class struggle being waged by the proletariat for the successful achievement of the aims of its dictatorship for the elimination of all forms of exploitation of man by man.

Lenin demonstrated that the Marxist world outlook is the only true expression of the culture of the revolutionary proletariat. He mentioned that without rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois, Marxism has assimilated and refashioned the values of more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture and the proletarian dictatorship is the final struggle against every form of exploitation that could be recognized as the development of a genuine proletarian culture. Lenin always emphasized the need for a proletarian class culture without which there can never be any proletarian revolution or

socialism. His concept of culture is always conditioned with the class struggle for the abolition of classes and exploitation. Lenin considered culture as part of superstructure which is determined by the base i.e. economy. He spoke about two cultures, i.e. individualistic bourgeois culture and proletarian collective culture in relation to the private property.

On the other hand, Ambedkar considered culture as more social than economic. He considered culture as the root of the society upon which the longevity and survivability of a political and economic structure depends. In his article, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, Ambedkar pointed that the Varna system which initially practised and maintained as a part of culture by the Aryan at the Indo-Aryan period later precipitated into caste (Ambedkar 2014). It became the foundation of society that started determining ruler and ruled hereditarily for thousands years. In his book, *“Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India”*, Ambedkar highlighted the role culture as an important weapon at the hands of oppressor to exploit the people. Ambedkar mentioned about the revolutionary culture based on equality and for the transformation of society. Ambedkar declared culture as the source of power and therefore culture occupies an important position in the thought of Ambedkar (Ambedkar 2014). Ambedkar pointed that the conflict Buddhism and Hinduism is nothing but the conflict between the culture of equality and the culture of inequality. Hinduism made inequality as the culture of Indian society through its religious dogma and superstition. Therefore Ambedkar understood Buddhism as source of new egalitarian revolutionary culture, values and morality for the transformation of the Indian society.

Both Lenin and Ambedkar recognized the importance of the revolutionary culture for the social revolution. The difference is that Lenin considered it as a part of superstructure while Ambedkar recognized it as the foundation of society which has a determining role on everything.

LENIN AND AMBEDKAR ON EDUCATION

While discussing about the importance of knowledge, Lenin mentioned that the people are realizing knowledge as an important weapon in their struggle for emancipation and their failures are due to lack of education (Lenin 1965). He considered education as one of the component parts of the proletarian class struggle. Without education, the hypocrisy and lies of the bourgeois could not be countered with the complete and honest truth. He declared that the soviet education and the Marxist outlook have discredited the belief that bourgeois democracy serves the interests of the majority. He countered the hypocrisy of the bourgeois educational system that claims it above politics. Lenin told that the term apolitical or non-political education is a piece of bourgeois hypocrisy. Lenin pointed that the education was thoroughly mixed with the bourgeois caste spirit. In all bourgeois states the connection between political apparatus and education is very strong, although bourgeois society cannot frankly acknowledge it. The reactionary education is indoctrinated into the masses through the church and the institution of private property (Lenin 1968). He has taken education as part of the struggle for overthrowing the bourgeoisie. According to Lenin, education divorced from life and politics is lies and hypocrisy. He realized education as indispensable for the successful victory of proletariat over the bourgeois (Lenin 1965: 84-87).

Ambedkar had also the similar approach on education. The community which Ambedkar belonged to is deprived of education since thousand years by the Brahminical forces. Ambedkar mentioned that the complete denial of education to the Shudra and untouchable was one of the cardinal principles of Brahmanism which is responsible for their degradation and suffering (Ambedkar 2014). Therefore Ambedkar gave the slogan of “educate, agitate and organize”. He emphasized the necessity of education to counter Brahmanism because he

found that the foundations of Brahmanism are the superstition and illiteracy. He considered education as a double edged weapon can destroy the tyranny as well as can maintain the tyranny. In that sense whether education can destroy the caste or not he pointed that if education is given as it is today, it will have no effect on caste. He mentioned that are highly educated upper castes never developed any interest to annihilate the caste. Instead they are very much eager to defend and preserve the caste system by interpreting it in many way utilizing their degree and intellect. Therefore he said, "in fact, an educated person belonging to the higher caste is more interested, after his education, to retain the caste system than he was not educated." That's the negative side of education he pointed. But he advocated that education can lead the social transformation and fight caste system if it is given to the lower strata of the Indian society. It would raise their spirit of rebellion to fight against exploitation. Therefore Ambedkar mentioned that if education is given to those who have a vested interest to protect the caste system, then the caste system will be strengthened and if it is given to the lower strata of society who is interested to blowing up the caste system, then the caste system will be blown down (Ambedkar 2014). Ambedkar criticized the indiscriminate education given by the Indian government and America foundation by saying that it will strengthen the caste system. He mentioned that to make rich richer and poor poorer is not the way to abolish poverty. While emphasising the need of providing education to the marginalised and lower strata of the Indian society, Ambedkar mentioned that to give education to those who want protect the caste system is not to improve the prospect of democracy in India but to put our democracy in greater jeopardy. As far the education is concerned both Lenin and Ambedkar have taken similar stand. Both of them considered education as an essential part of their struggle for equality.

On the questions of religion, culture, morality and education, Lenin and Ambedkar share almost similar approach with some differences that are imposed by their respective social conditions.

Both considered religion has been one of the major means of social oppression. While Lenin understood religion and culture a part of superstructure which are shaped by the economic structure of the society, Ambedkar found these two as determining factors or base that regulate the social institutions and peoples psychologies including the economic social relations. Since religion divides the oppressed on the basis of graded inequality of the caste, Ambedkar adopted Buddhism, a religion, free from the discourse of god and close to rationality and science, to fight the graded inequality of caste, thus uniting the whole oppressed under one banner to uproot hegemonic social structure based on inequality and oppressed. Both rejected the old oppressive culture and morality and sought for new revolutionary culture and morality for the social transformation. For Lenin, the revolutionary culture and morality is directly linked with the question of class struggle, while Ambedkar understood Buddhism as a means for equality and social transformation as well as the source of revolutionary culture and morality. Both of them emphasised the need of education for social revolution. Both adopted education as a means as well as an end. Without education, neither the oppressed can be realised about the vicious social oppression nor can they be mobilised for social action. The social thoughts of Lenin and Ambedkar is deeply guided and shaped with the vision of transforming the society with higher moral values. Since every society is organised with the hierarchy of class, caste, race with the oppressive culture and moral values, the social ideas of Lenin and Ambedkar provides a great insights to reflect on those with a critical approach to transform society towards humanism and equality.

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