

**Upliftment of the Oppressed and Neglected Section of the Society: A
Comparative Study Between Karl Marx and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

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Abstract

Karl Marx and Ambedkar both fought for the upliftment of the oppressed and neglected section of the society. But their method and approach to tackle the problem are different. Virtually Ambedkar denied Marxist approach and method. In this article, I would like to make a comparative study between these two eminent persons' opinion on that issue.

In the nineteenth century Karl Marx's concept of society and the state are revolutionary. According to Marx at the very beginnings of human civilization, there was no discrimination. The production and the products were communally owned. Since each member of society produced both for himself and for the society, there were no conflict of interests between the individual and groups. A state of communism prevailed in those days. However, with the emergence of private property, in particular private ownership of the forces of production a minority group is able to control, command and enjoy the fruits of labour of the majority.¹

According to Marxian view in the Capitalist Society, the bourgeois or ruling class owns the means of production. The proletariat or working classes own only their labour. The ruling class exploits and oppresses the working class. As a result there is a basic conflict of interests between the two classes. Religious institution is also used as another instrument of

oppression. Religion is a supernatural belief. In Marx vision, religion is an illusion. It is the main cause of exploitation and oppression. To Marx religion is the opium of the people. Marx viewed that “Religion does not simply cushion the effects of oppression. It acts as a mechanism of social control maintaining the existing system of exploitation and reinforcing class relationships.”²

Keywords: Upliftment, oppressed, State, Society, Marx, Ambedkar

According to Marx socialism has two stages—Socialism and Communism. In Socialism, every worker will get wages according to his workload. In Communism according to his needs, Capitalism will be vanished and the dictatorship of the proletariat will be established in a classless society. Thus Marx thought that in Communism a classless society will prevail. Class struggles will come to an end. This is the ideal or aim of Karl Marx.

Dr. Ambedkar in the Article, “Buddha or Karl Marx” says—“A comparison between Karl Marx and Buddha may be regarded as a joke. There need to be no surprise in this. Marx and Buddha are divided by 2381 years. Buddha was born in 563 B.C. Marx born in 1818 A.D. Karl Marx is supposed to be the architect of a new ideology-polity, a new economic system. Buddha on the other hand is believed to be no more than the founder of a religion which has no relation to politics and economics.”³ In spite of this, Ambedkar made a comparison between the teachings of Buddha and Karl Marx in his article entitled, “Buddha or Karl Marx”.

Karl Marx and Buddha both are revolutionary. Both fought for the distressed and oppressed section of society. But they differ in adopting the means and methods used for the solution of the problem. Marx noticed that there is exploitation of the rich over the poor. The rich have the property in

their hold and the poor are devoid of property. Actually the property which belongs to the rich are the property of the poor. They have taken away by force. This is the starting point of Karl Marx. He was the word ‘exploitation’ again and again. To remove the sufferings of the poor class, abolition of private property is necessary. Karl Marx introduces a new concept of surplus value in this context. This surplus value should go to the exploited class, not to the exploiter or bourgeois class. According to Marx, state is the owner of the surplus value and it should be distributed, among the working people.

Marx used the word “exploitations”. But it is Buddha, who used the word ‘Dukkha’ or suffering in the same sense in 2400 years before Karl Marx. There are lots of places in the Buddhist literature where Buddha has used the word “Dukkha” in the sense of poverty. Therefore, so far as the foundation of Marxism and Buddhism is concerned there is really no difference at all. Buddha long before Marx was against private ownership.

Difference lies in the method and process of abolishing the private ownership. Buddha upholds the method of love, morality and persuasion to conquer the opponents mind. His method is the method of non-violence and love. Karl Marx, on the other hands upholds the method active revolution. He approved the violent force to conquer the opponents.

Buddha puts too much importance on modification of mental set-up. Marxism does not put so much importance to change of mental set-up. Psychological factor is not so important to Karl Marx.⁴

Karl Marx and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were two revolutionaries who raised their voices against—social and economic exploitations. They

established new ideas and methods to emancipate the millions of working class and depressed communities respectively.

Marxism is the name for a coherent system of the ideas for social change. It starts with the theory that there is exploitation in the world. The poor are exploited by the rich. The rich has accumulated all the properties in their hands. Private property and enslavement are the root cause of suffering and sorrows of the poor.

Dr. Ambedkar depended on the principles of Buddhism. He observed that Marx preached the same thing which Lord Buddha did in 2400 years ago. Ambedkar thus observed :

“The goal of Buddha and of Marx was the same. Marx said that private property was the root cause of sorrow. It resulted – in exploitations suffering and enslavement. Buddha also wanted to abolish ‘Dukkha’ (sorrow) and the word sorrow was used in the Bauddha literature in the sense of property. According to Buddha, everything was impermanent and so there was no struggle for property. The Bhikkhus were not allowed to own private property. Buddha did not lay the foundation of his religion on God or Soul.”⁵

Both Marx and Ambedkar pointed out that the root cause of exploitation and sorrows is private property. Economic cause is the main cause. They agree that private property was the cause of exploitation. Dr. Ambedkar condemned everything that sings for poverty. He realized the evil results of machinery which has made private property. According to him, “The remedy is not to condemn machinery or civilization but to alter the organization of society so that the benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue to all”.⁶

Dr. Ambedkar viewed that the history of society was the history of class society. He remarked thus : “Society is always composed of classes. Their basis may differ. They may be economic or intellectual or social, but an individual of a society is always member of a class. For we have only to determine what was the class that first made itself into a caste. They so to say are next door neighbours and it is only a span that separate the two. A caste is an enclosed class.”⁷

Thus Ambedkar’s interpretation of Indian Society is similar to the historical materialism of Marx.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted to outline the shape and form of the economic structure as well as the political structure of society on the basis of the law. He advocated “State Socialism” to eradicate poverty and to end exploitation which was similar to Marxian creed. He proposed state ownership in agriculture and state-socialism in the field of industry.⁸

Dr. Ambedkar analyzed his concept of ‘state socialism’ thus : The problem, therefore, is to have state socialism without dictatorship, to have state socialism with parliamentary democracy. The way out seems to be to retain parliamentary democracy to prescribe state Socialism by law of the Constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of the parliamentary majority to suspend or amend or abrogate it. It is only by this that can one achieve triple objects, namely, to establish socialism, to retain parliamentary democracy and to avoid dictatorship.

Dr. Ambedkar regarded the Chaturvarna system as the anti-thesis of socialism. This system will divide the people. According to him, caste consciousness hampered all economic growth. The problem of socialism in India was more social than economic. He said, “If the socialist wish to

make socialism a definite reality, then they must recognize that the problem of social reform is fundamental and that for them there is no escape from it.”⁹

Dr. Ambedkar differed from Marxism in the theory of the ‘dictatorship of proletariat’. Ambedkar puts stress on the reformation of mental set up of the rulers and the ruled. This teaching Ambedkar receives from the teaching of Lord Buddha.

The Marxist political theory is based on the dictatorship of the proletariat. The application of the concept of proletarian revolution in India was according to Ambedkar impractical and utopian because of its traditional social system. Dr. Ambedkar said, “To exhort the proletariat to bring about an economic revolution.”¹⁰ Karl Marx told them, “you have nothing to lose except your chains.”¹¹ Because of social and religious binding among the castes a group has more property in their hands, and the other group has less. Ambedkar, therefore, wanted democratic right to all, he did not ask for the dictatorship of the proletariat, nor the dictatorship of the rich. Ambedkar defined Democracy as a form and method of Government. Ambedkar again differs from Marx on the issue of using the method of revolution. According to him, there is no need of violent revolution as conceived by Marx.

Dr. Ambedkar observes that Indian Constitution established political democracy and also set the ideals for which the country should approach. That ideal was economic democracy. Ambedkar maintained that fundamental rights are useless, if the economic security is not attend. To achieve their goals “state socialism” within the framework of parliamentary democracy is to be established.¹²

Ambedkar's rejection of Marxism and defects of Marxian Socialism have been explained by Ambedkar in his Article entitled, "Annihilation of Caste". He wrote : "The socialists of India following their fellows in Europe are seeking to apply the economic interpretation of history to the facts of India. They propound that man is an economic creature, that his activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, that property is the only source of power. They, therefore, preach that political and social reforms are but gigantic illusions and that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform."¹³

Marx believed in uniform society. In this society there will be no conflict between the exploited and exploiter oppressed and oppressor. Marx also believed that economic forces guide the destiny of mankind. Dr. Ambedkar's analysis is different. He did not think of political revolution, but of social reformation. Indian economy is based on capitalist model. It may be termed as pseudo-capitalism. Social inequalities were so acute to it that they do not help to unite the working class. Workers of India do not write. According to Ambedkar, it is not the economic factor, but caste system which causes the conflict between the exploiter and exploited in India.

Socialist movement was carried out in India on the Marxist lines. But it did not appeal to the poor masses who are born and brought up in caste-oriented society.

Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy is somewhere in between Capitalism and Socialism. Mahatma Gandhi, the great national leader of India did not bother about caste system and its victims except that he disliked untouchability. He did not take any active role to abolish Casteism. He

failed to recognize the basic principles of racialism. If a system generates conflicts, these conflicts cannot be resolved without destroying the system itself.¹⁴

Thus there are some basic differences between the theories held by Marx and Ambedkar. Karl Marx insists on the rule of the proletariat. But Dr. Ambedkar does not rule out the possibility of the proletariat. He wants to build up a moral man for whom power will be a duty. His moral man will not use power for oppression and exploitation, but reform the mental make-up. Marx does not subscribe to parliamentary methods to end exploitation, while Dr. Ambedkar does believe in the method of parliamentary democracy. Further, Dr. Ambedkar believed that Indian soil is not fit for dictatorship in any form. His aim was to establish equality, liberty and fraternity. Dr. Ambedkar described democratic polity as the most suitable form for India. Indian followers of Marx realized that economic forces alone do not decide the path to progress. Social and religious forces also play an important role in building up a healthy society. To eliminate conflicts there has to be a mix of all these factors.

NOTES

1. Collected from the Article ‘Marx, Dr. Ambedkar and the Polarisation of the Exploited Classes in India’ by B.R. Seniaray published on a National Seminar and compiled by SISES, BapuBhavan, satnagar, KaralBagh, New Delhi, Page 72.
2. “Buddha or Karl Marx” – collected from the Writings and Speeches of B.R. Ambedkar, vol. 1, Page 73.
3. *Ibid*, Page

4. Collected from the article “Buddhism and Communism” included Political Thinker of Modern India 16, B.R. Ambedkar, Edited by Verinder Grover, Page 70, Deep and Deep Publications, F-159, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi.
5. Speech delivered on ‘Buddha and Karl Marx’ on 20th November, 1956 to a Buddhist Conference of Fellowship held in Kathmandu.
6. B.R. Ambedkar, ‘What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables’, Page 294, Thacker and Co., Bombay, 1947.
7. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, vol. 1, page 15, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979.
8. *Ibid*, Page 408.
9. Annihilation of Caste, B.R. Ambedkar, Page 19-21.
10. Collected from the Article ‘Marx, Dr. Ambedkar and the Polarisation of the Exploited Classes in India’ by B.R. Seniaray published on a National Seminar and compiled by SISES, BapuBhavan, satnagar, KaralBagh, New Delhi, Page 74.
11. *Ibid*, Page 77.
12. *Ibid*, Page 78.
13. Annihilation of Caste : B.R. Ambedkar, Collected from : Writings and Speeches, vol. I, Page 44.
14. Collected from the Article Written by K.R. Sunda, published by SISES, Karol Bagh, New Delhi.

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