

Labour movement in India and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

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Abstract: The development of capitalism in India was relatively slow, so the development of industrialization was also slow. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, as industrialization developed in India, peasants, in order to escape the tyranny of feudalism and zamindars for a long time, began to leave agricultural work and join industrial factories as a labourers, but even here their misery knew no bounds. Here they are oppressed and exploited by the factory owners instead of the feudal lords or zamindars. Some kind people of the society are coming forward with their help to get rid of this condition. They take some activities to increase the awareness of the workers. But over time the workers realize that no one will give them their rights and they have to take their rights for themselves. So they started the movement. The inevitable result of the early movements was conflict between workers and employers and in the end the helpless surrender of the workers. But gradually the awareness among the workers increased and they were able to form a movement and force the employers to accept their demands. They formed various trade unions to lead the movement. Subsequently, the leaders of the National Congress, recognizing the importance of the working class in the Indian national movement or independence movement, recognized the labour movement and incorporated the interests of the workers into the program of the National Congress. The Communist Party of India was formed to protect the interests and demands of the workers and they directly supported the labour movement. The main objective of the Communist Party was to get the workers' demands from the factory owners through the movement. However, Babasaheb Ambedkar's contribution in this case is undeniable. Remembering the plight of the workers, Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party in 1936 to liberate the workers from this predicament and to realize their demands. As the Minister of Labour of the Viceroy Executive Council from 1942-46, Ambedkar enacted various laws in the interest of the working class, which are equally relevant today in the interest of the working class.

The purpose of this paper is to rethink the dynamics of the working class movement in India and to find out what steps Ambedkar took to solve the problems of the working class by rethinking Ambedkar's contribution to the labour movement.

Keywords: Development, Capitalism, Industrialization, Peasant, Feudalism, Society,

INTRODUCTION

The working class movement was not a special issue in any one particular country. It was a whole worldwide movement. Political leaders and philosophers in each country recognized the importance of the working class movement and recognized it. The labour movement in different countries arose as a result of industrialization or the development of capitalism and this process continued in some other form and has long had an impact on the production system. Although the basic programs of the labour movement differ in different social systems.

The labour movement in Europe began with the Industrial Revolution, when a large number of people left agriculture and joined various factories as workers. The labour movement became an active force in the Great Britain, Soviet Union, New Zealand and Australia. In France, however, the pace of the labour movement slowed down for a variety of reasons. Predominantly rural character of France and the wide division of the labour movement severely weakened the French trade union movement.

The programs and activities of the labour movement may vary from country to country. The functions of the trade unions are different in the capitalist countries and in the socialist countries. The main programs of the labour movement in the socialist countries are to contributing towards raising the productivity of labour, improvement in quality of production, assisting in the technical progress and participating in the planning and regulation of wages. But in capitalist countries labour movement aim at maintaining and improving wages, hours and conditions of work. They also aim at full employment, collective bargaining and defending the right of the workers.

OBJECTIVES, METHOD AND MATERIALS

The objective of this paper is to highlight Dr. Ambedkar's views of the problems of labourers in India and to aware them of their rights. Information has been collected from the Indian Constitution, internet, published papers and various books. Historical and analytical methods have been used to write the paper.

DISCUSSION

Labour movement in India

The labour movement in India developed as an inevitable consequence of the capitalist system and the factory production system. The labour movement in India came relatively late. The reasons for the delay in the labour movement in India was the slow progress in industrialization in the country, the illiteracy of the workers, their migratory habits and heterogeneous composition of labour force in the industrial centres.

Plantation of tea, cotton and jute manufacturing, coal mining and railways got a real start in India between 1850 to 1860. It can be said that the working class of India was involved in the operation of machinery in the factories, coal mines and tea gardens. The workers who worked in the scattered factories here and there were the pioneers of the Indian working class.

The first development of capitalism in India was in Bombay, Kolkata and Madras, so the number of workers in these three cities was higher and the labour movement started in these three cities. The context of the labour movement in India was created between 1850 to 1870. However, no labour movement was formed at the national level with any demands. Personal and some variant attempts to mobilize workers have been identified. In Calcutta, before 1870, some reform work was started among the workers at the initiative of the Brahmo Samaj. Shashipad Banerjee, a Brahmin leader, set up a workers' welfare organization in Baranagar to carry out renovation work among jute mill workers. He established a night school to educate the local workers. At the initiative of the Brahmo leaders, a newspaper called 'Bharat Shramjibi' was published. According to records, in 1877, workers at 'Empress Mills' in Nagpur went on strike for the first time demanding wages.

The 'Factory Commission' was first formed in 1875 to improve the condition of the workers. A factory law was passed in 1881 to improve the condition of the workers. This law introduced the rule that workers should not be allowed to work more than 15 hours.

In 1884, an employee named Lokhande organized a conference of Bombay textile mill workers and submitted an application signed by five and a half thousand workers to the Bombay Factory Commissioner. In 1889, another application was submitted to the authorities by the workers of Bombay. In this application, the workers made the following demands: (i) one day (Sunday) off in a week, (ii) pay regular wages, (iii) compensation for the accident.

A meeting of 10,000 workers was held again in Mumbai in 1890. It was at this time that the first attempt was made by Mr. Lokhande and another man named Bengali to established the 'Bombai Mill Workers' Association' or 'Bombay Mill Hands Association', which may be called the first trade union in India.

Another Factory Act was passed in 1891 when the factory owner continued to disobey the Factory Act, 1881. But the employers refused to comply and the workers were forced to revolt if the persecution of the workers continued unabated. The revolt of the workers took the form of a strike. In 1894 the textile workers of the city of Bombay went on a strike. Mill workers in Ahmedabad staged a major strike in February, 1895 and at this time workers at the Budge Budge Jute Mill near Kolkata went on strike and they did strike in June, 1896 and again in 1900. In 1897, workers in the city of Bombay went on strike demanding daily wages.

In 1897, the railway workers formed an organization. The organization was originally called 'The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma'. In 1903, workers were forced to work overtime at the 'Government Press' in Madras, but for this they were not paid so the workers went on strike. The strike lasted for about six months. In September 1905, workers of the 'Government of India Press' in Kolkata went on strike over a number of allegations. These are: (i) non-payment on Sunday and gazette holidays, (ii) unjustly fined, (iii) paying low wages for overtime, (iv) even though given a medical certificate, did not agree to be granted leave by the authorities. The strike lasted for a month.

In 1907, workers at the Samastipur Railway Workshop in Bengal went on strike to demand higher wages. As a result of this strike, the workers received a famine allowance. A number of strikes took place in Bombay in the year 1910 to demand a shorter working hours.

In 1910, a workers' organization called 'Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha' was organized in Mumbai under the leadership of B. R. Nare, S. K. Bole and N. R. Talcherkar. The union demanded 12 hours of work time from the owners.

A new wave of strikes erupted in protest of rising commodity prices and labour costs during the First World War. This was the beginning of a new chapter in the labour movement.

The establishment of a working class government in the Soviet Union in 1917 caused a great stir among the working class. It was at this time in 1918 that the first trade union was established in Madras under the leadership of Mr. B. P. Wadia. In 1919, there were many strikes in Madras, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and other places. At this time all the textile workers in Bombay went on a general strike at once. In 1920, there were massive strikes in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Solapur, textile mills and factories, railway workers in the Punjab, and in the Government Press in Calcutta, Delhi and Shimla, and in the Tata Iron Factory.

Between the years 1919 and 1920 there were more than 200 strikes. The main demands of these strikes were two: (i) reduction in hard work time, (ii) wage increase.

It was in this context that the 'All India Trade Union Congress' was founded on 31st December 1920 at the 'Empire Theater Hall' in Bombay. AITUC was the first all India organized labour movement in India. From this point of view, the birth of AITUC marked the beginning of a new chapter in the Indian labour movement. After this incident, trade unions of different provinces began to form. During this time the 'Bengal Jute Workers Association' was formed to conduct a strike in Bengal. In 1923, a session of the AITUC was held in Lahore under the chairmanship of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. In 1923, there were also large-scale strikes in the textile mills of Bombay and Ahmedabad. The strikes that took place in the railways and railway factories from 1925 to 1926 were significant. NW Rail Factory, Rawalpindi, Lahore Karachi BNW Rail Gorakhpur Factory and Bengal Nagpur Railway Kharagpur Factory are on strike at the moment. The strike resumed in Bangladesh in 1926.

In the year 1925-26, the strength of the labour movement in India increased further. Under the influence of Marxism, attempts were also made to organize the working class as an independent force. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the working class became vocal about their demands. The Indian leadership accepted that the protection of the interests of the workers was in fact the protection of the national interest and the leaders like Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Roy directly supported the labour movement. It is acknowledged that the positive role of workers in the political and economic affairs of India.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's role in the labour movement in India

Throughout his life, Ambedkar worked for the development of the Dalit, labours and peasants. It was the Dalit movement that led Ambedkar along with the labour movement. Because he realized that most of the Dalit class were poor peasants and labours. Therefore, it is never possible to do all around development of the Dalit class without excluding the labours and peasants. So he emphasized the development of the working class.

Ambedkar grew up in an environment where he had to witness the extreme misery of the workers. Their lives had no value. Even after working hard all day, they did not have enough food in their family. To them education and health were just fantasies. They had to work in extremely unhealthy environments as the accommodation was unhealthy. This miserable plight of the labours moved his mind from an early age. A silent but formidable promise to relieve the grief of this inner class that made his heart ache and was born in his mind.

So he has worked all his life for the development of the poor peasants and workers along with the development of the Dalit. We see the reflection of this effort through the formation of the 'Independent labour Party' in 1936. The purpose of this party is to prove Ambedkar's commitment to the working class. Through the ILP, he wanted to implement a strong labour policy in India. Through the law, he wanted to achieve a respectable plan for workers' allowances, working hours and their basic needs. He wanted to protect the working class of India from the grip of capitalism. At a public meeting of Dalit

railway workers on February 13, 1936, he said: “ ---- the two enemies which the workers of this country have to deal with the Brahmanism and Capitalism.”

In 1938, under the leadership of Ambedkar, the ILP, along with the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, organized a huge march from Konkan to Bombay, attended by twenty thousand workers and peasants. In 1938, the ILP, in a joint effort with the Communists, tried to organize a movement to unite the textile workers because there was no limit to the plight of the workers at the time. Workers had to work 13 to 15 hours hard. Then they would get so tired that many would not have the strength to go back home. The condition of women workers was indescribable. A large number of child laborers were employed, most of them between the ages of 7 and 10. 40% of the workers were child laborers. He tried to build this movement to liberate the workers from this miserable condition. Reviewing this miserable condition of the workers, he was saddened and called for a united movement of peasants and workers that would establish their basic rights.

In 1942 he joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as the in-charge of labour affairs and he held the post from 1942 to 1946. Ambedkar, along with the Communists, had a significant contribution to make to the present rights of the workers we see in modern India today. The Seven Labour Conference was held on 27 November 1942 under the leadership of Ambedkar. The working hours are fixed by law and working hours are reduced from 14 hours to 8 hours. The employer cannot force a worker more than 8 hours. He has taken a number of initiatives for women workers and child laborers such as Mine Maternity Benefit Act, Women Labour Welfare Fund, Women and child labour protection Act, Maternity Benefit for Women Labour etc. In his efforts, Special protections for women have been provided in Article 15 and 15(3) of the Indian Constitution. Article 19(1) is a special safeguard for the dignity and protection of women workers. Article 39(d) states that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 states that the State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

The National Employment Agency is the result of his efforts and foresight. He realized the lack of skilled workers in India and was similarly opposed to nepotism. He thought that it was possible to solve the labour problem through a worker investment center in a certain area. Dr. Ambedkar also enacted the Employees State Insurance (ESI) scheme for providing workers with medical care, compensation for injuries, insurance etc. He preached the theory of solving the problem through the tripartite i.e. government, employer and labour negotiations. For this reason, he gave legitimacy to trade unions or Associations in Article 19 (1) C of the Constitution. As head of the Labour Department, he spoke of special training to enhance the skills of the labourers. He would also keep in mind that factory should not be closed for the sake of the labour movement because he realized that if the factory was closed, the income of the workers would be cut off and their misery would be unlimited. Dr. Ambedkar was also instrumental in enacting the Coal Mines Safety (Stowing) Amendment Bill for the benefit of the mine workers on January 31st, 1944. On 8th April 1946, he brought the Mica Mines Labor Welfare Fund, which helped the workers with housing, water supply, education, entertainment, and co-operative arrangements. Beside this, he is also credited to introduce various welfare initiatives for workers such as providing them with Dearness Allowance (DA), Leave Benefit to Piece Workers and Labour Welfare Funds. In 1943, he brought the Indian Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill for the compulsory recognition of trade unions. Apart from the above mentioned initiatives, other significant measures taken by him to

ensure the welfare of the workers are: Health Insurance Scheme, Factory Amendment Act, Labour Disputes Act and determination of minimum wages.

However he could not agree with the Congress and the Communist Party on labour development and the labour movement. Ambedkar understood that the Congress was actually fueling capitalism and he did not hesitate to declare it in public. He felt that the Congress Party and Gandhiji were not very interested in defending the interests of the working people. On the other hand, ideologically, the Marxists did not have much of a conflict with Ambedkar but in the social and political context of India at that time, there was a controversy over the method and direction of their struggle. He never directly supported the communist movement in India. In fact, the socialism of the Ambedkar was founded on the struggle against untouchability and against the orthodoxy of the upper castes and against the caste system of the society. He realized that unity among the working class could never be achieved without the complete abolition of the caste system. Moreover, he was opposed to the proletarian dictatorship of the communists. He expressed his views in favor of large and ideal democracy as the direction of his revolution.

CONCLUSION

Though Dr. Ambedkar is primarily known as a leader of the untouchables and later on as the chief architect of the constitution of India, his contribution in labour issue is also equally substantial. Dr. Ambedkar had been so much concerned about the issues of the workers, that he founded an Independent Labour Party in August 1936, and drew up a comprehensive programme which answered all the immediate needs and grievances of the landless, poor tenants, agriculture and industrial workers. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was one of the very few Indians who struggled to alter the course of Indian history through social and economic democracy. He was deeply concerned over economic and social exploitation of depressed classes' particularly labour class. Throughout his life, he has worked for the development of the Dalit class as well as the working class. The steps he took in the interests of the working class are equally relevant today.

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