

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and his Ideas to Improving the Condition of Indian Agriculture System: with Special Aspects of Land-Labour Relationship

Poonam Bhartiya¹

¹Research Scholar, Gautam Buddha University.

Abstract

Agriculture and allied products make one of the big parts of the Indian economy is directly and indirectly connected with the livelihood of the huge part of the Indian population are depending on agriculture. Basically India is the agriculture-based economy and the management of agricultural land and labour is a big subject in India. From the early period in Indian history, agriculture reform was always state priority but after British colonial policy, it became the most exploited sector. After that many agriculture policies made by the Indian government for this sector. Agriculture land has different issues and barriers after British colonization in India.

Historical Background

History of Indian systematic agriculture was started with Indus Valley Civilization which was correlated with good balance of the trade-agriculture relationship. In the Later Vedic period when Aryan's moved to Ganga valley and started agriculture activity then it created the most productive area of modern India's mainland. After political development, Ganga valley became a new destination for peasants. Some other places were also developed as good agricultural

areas like the Deccan plateau, south Krishna-Kaveri region, and Assam valley, etc. From ancient to medieval period most of the kings of the different empires were always wanted to direct command on these areas due to high revenue but they also did their effort for reform of those agriculture areas. During the British period trend in Indian agriculture and the nature of crops had been changed due to British economic policies and heavy land revenue. After the

decline of the Mughal Empire the trade was a breakdown and the village developed as a self subsisting economy. The interrelationship between handicraft and agricultural group was very strong. Barter system was popular in the market for daily measurement. In this period per person agriculture ratio was positive due to limited population and extracurricular activity. Selling and purchasing the land was not popular because the nature of the Pecuniary society was absent until pre-British India. After the British interruption in the Indian economy, agriculture land was changed into the semi-feudal agrarian system because of the starting of private property rights and the Zamindari settlement. The situations were changed, in the early period the land revenue system was main economic policy of the British Government in India. With the requirement of British Industries, they created conditions for the cultivation of different commercial crops for raw material to British Industries. It breaks down the features of a self-sufficient Indian village. Many farmers were decided to start farming of commercial crop in place of agriculture crop and others were sold out of their land. It also changed farmers-handicrafts and land-labour relationship. Farmers were helpless and sold their land at a very cheap cost to British entrepreneurs for the

establishment of their mines, plantations, etc. The fertility of land went down and fragmentation of land became the most problematic thing in Indian agriculture system. After the breakdown of Indian handicraft industry and landless peoples also became agriculture labourers. Peasants were also moved to such activities due to high revenue and famines. There were many problems with other settlements like Ryotwari in which the 'ryot' word was just symbolic. There were many problems in this system like illiteracy between peasants, was as a barrier to understand the situations, Different social ties and caste panchayat made custom barriers, Administrative problems (thousands of villages were only under one district officer), Personal and political biases was dominative on British administrator. There was one another problem in the ryotwari system that the dominant families acted as zamindar and it created agriculture struggle.

Dr. Ambedkar and Indian Agriculture Problems

With a lot of problems in agriculture India grow up as a mixed economy and the agriculture and allied sectors were became the most important part of the country. There was much reform done by the new

government for the reestablishment of agriculture productivity. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was completed his research on Indian administration, financial system, currency system (the problem of the rupee) and problem of smallholding in India. If we talk about agriculture then Dr. Ambedkar says that with the increase of population the problem of smallholding was increased in India. In his word,

*“It is the failure to grasp the working of this pressure on land that makes the law of inheritance such a great grievance”.*¹

He wrote a review paper on agriculture with the name of *“smallholding in India and their remedies”* in the *journal of Indian economic society* in 1918, and discussed on the issue of agriculture problem and its reform. He also visited different places and study of the land system, legislation and their ownership and the condition of peasant group and found that Indian condition about to agriculture trend was very unsatisfactory and that’s why he wanted to introduce reform of those countries in India.² He did his research on the problem of smallholdings, khoti system, Mahar Watan, landless labours, land revenue, financial intermediaries and suggested to make Indian agriculture as an economic holding. He also suggested to the abolition of landlordism.

He was the first Indian who examined the problem of subdivision of agriculture land. First, he divided industries into two parts like primary and secondary. The primary industry means Agriculture and allied productive industries (agro-based) and secondary means manufacturing type. According to him, “growth of the primary and extracting industries are fundamental in a parallel way. Primary industry extract from physical world useful material which became the original sources of man’s subsistence and they provide the raw material for the secondary or manufacturing industries”. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the main problem in Indian Agriculture Economy was dealing directly with agriculture production (what to produce). He said that the proper production depended on two factors first was the size of holdings and the second was the ‘tenure of land. He blames to the bad social economy for the illness of Indian Agriculture. He said that under existing social economy the remedies for consolidation and enlargement were bound to fail. He also knew the agriculture efficiency and pain for low productivity because India always has a big fertile agriculture area but in the British period, conditions were different. Indian farmers had not enough resources to nourish their land for more fertility due to the extra

burden of different taxes on agriculture land. Famine was also as a monster for poor farmers. Dr. Ambedkar says that the basic problem of Indian agriculture was, not to capable enough to generate surplus which ultimately created scarcity of capital this condition inevitable the use of labour in cultivation and also the Dr.opdown the proportion between the tillage cultivated land and the population of the country (as compare to other countries like USA, Italy, Ireland and Russia).

He argued that,

*“A large agriculture population with the lowest proportion of land in actual cultivation meant that a large part of the agricultural population was superfluous and ideal”.*³

Indian agriculture problem is not only the problem of economy-related but there has social aspect at the root level so the process of land reform must be a process of slow growth and adjustment and also handle with the root system of society. Dr. Ambedkar had also given these solutions by removing of social inequality and injustice with landless caste labours. Overall on the question of agricultural inducement, his answer was Industrialization, and to made agriculture as useful for the Achieving of

goal to best industrial production and to make India as a developed country

Solution Given by Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar found that the decrease in the size of holdings was occurring from time to time. Dr. Ambedkar presents the overall theory of land-labour reform. First, he suggests converting agriculture land as an ‘economic holding’ based on overall output not only production.

Economic Holding

Due to hereditary law and some British policies, agriculture land became fragmented. On these situations Dr. Ambedkar examines the evil of fragmentation and also about to method of consolidation for the restriping of land. According to him, it will be based on two principles first “Economic Unit” and second of “Original Ownership.”⁴ He says that the main problem of agriculture land is its nature of output and every agriculture land has own importance based on the economic output of that holding. According to him, an economic holding consists of an optimum combination of land capital and labour. He doesn’t want to explain it in limited words like production. For this, he gives a relevant strategy for agrarian reform to make a bond between primary and secondary sectors

(Agriculture and industries) of the Indian Economy. He calculates the land as primary capital, cash as secondary capital and labour as tertiary capital and all have their value in the market and economic holding only find by the combination of these three things. As he said that,

*“An economic holding is not a matter of the size of land alone but is a matter of the adjustment of pieces of land to the necessary requirement for its efficient cultivation”.*⁵

It also needs governmental support for irrigation and other reform like fertility of soil, production and management of supply system etc. The standard of living of the Indian peasants can't rise until a change in the land system supplies the essential economic basis of more efficient peasant's farmers.⁶ He gives the term 'ideal labour' which means to the development of human capital it's also meant to cultivate with high yielding. It may really call an economic holding. He also suggests to increased capital and capital goods by the savings, but saving is possible where there is surplus is a commonplace of political economy. For economic holding, he presents four-dimensional ideas. These are following-

1. Consolidation process

2. Enlargement process
3. Collective farming and
4. Rehabilitation of Land less labour

Consolidation

Consolidation is the process of re-striping of agriculture land with local conditions and needs. Dr. Ambedkar describes that though fragmentation involves waste of labour and cattle power, waste in hedges and boundary marks, and waste of manure.⁷ These disadvantages of fragmentation are to be recounted only to lend their support to the process of restriping or consolidation. There were different methods popular for restriping and the process of consolidation was one of them. In the method of restriping, khatedar and his holding was valued at the market price by the authorized person. After that, the process of land redistributed was started and each khatedar had been given new land in proportion to his original holding with the same value. If difference occurred than it was adjusted by cash payment. So khatedar got their equal value in the form of land or money although they got benefits in all conditions.⁸ But Dr. Ambedkar analyzed that consolidation is not enough and not successfully possible with in rational social economy. For further problem he suggested to government to take

up compulsory steps to restrict the scattered field in villages and restriping. He said that-

*“The problem of consolidation raises the following two issues :— (1) how to unite such small and scattered holdings as the existing ones, and (2) once consolidated how to perpetuate them at that Size”.*⁹

According to Dr. Ambedkar a serious criticism against these projects of consolidation that they had failed to understand that it's also required the enlargement of holdings as well. He also said about the differentiation and further result of all intellectuals at the level of defining the target and how to reach on target. After independence, the Indian Government followed of Dr. Ambedkar consolidation process. Most of the Indian states have enacted laws on the consolidation of new land reform.

Enlargement Process

Consolidation process was a process to find the result of Economic holding and different expert co-relates this with a different point of view as the standard of living of a farmer and support to his family by sufficient production. The definition for consolidation was critically examined by Dr. Ambedkar because it was only supported to the standpoint of consumption rather than of

production and according to him consumption is not the correct standard to judge the economic character of holding.¹⁰

Dr. Ambedkar has the opinion that if agriculture has to be treated as an economic enterprise then there would no such thing small and large. He says that the holdings may be small or large but the output depends upon other factors like tools, quality of seeds and irrigation etc Dr. Ambedkar argued that the proposal of enlarging the existing holding as a remedy to the ill of Indian agriculture can be entertained only if it is shown that farms have diminished in size while the agriculture stock has increased in amount.¹¹ He suggested that the enlargement of the size of a holding should be between 29 to 30 acres but should not be 100 or 200 acres. It means he suggests enlarging the land not to make bigger only but to make it more productive.

Collective Farming

In the ancient period distribution of collective land was popular as the climate climatic condition to avoid the failure of crop in individual cultivation. In ancient period cultivated unit was a joint family and fragmentation of land was uncommon but after British rule the interpretation of Hindu and Muslim law by English judges with the

strong predilection for individuals succession and private enjoyment of right on land.¹² Everybody wants to right on land even between family members. It was the result of a small division of land. Dr. Ambedkar also supports the theory of collective farming and says that the Agriculture sector should be based on 'Collective Farming' and should be nationalized in which holder would be "Debenture holders". He was better knew that only a few Indian peasants would able to maintain economic holding but most of the small peasant would not able to do this and a big population of landless labour would always without land. So he supports collective farming with state control. Dr. Ambedkar's collective farming was just like individual farming under state control. As a legislator he introduced a memorandum of states and minorities submitted to the constituent Assembly on behalf of the Scheduled Castes, The prescribed collective farming had following characters like, State shall divide in to standard size of plots and then made group of family for cultivation with the conditions of collective farming under the rules and direction issued by government, Distribution should be divide without differentiation of caste creed and landless labour, State should finance them with the supply of water, Dr.ought, animals,

implementation manure and for seeds etc and state could be charged fine also if rule-breaking as a portion of land revenue, a portion to pay debenture holder, a portion to pay for the use of capital goods and supply, or prescribed penalties against tenants who break the conditions to tenancy or other rules of collective farming.¹³

Rehabilitation of Landless Labour

The agriculture landless labour class was basically exploited class in the rural hierarchy they had no ownership right on land because they were not inherited. They were the victim of social discrimination by advancing the small loans to them. The zamindar's and landlords often succeeded in trapping these poor people and converted them into virtual slaves.¹⁴ They found very low income through his livelihood. According to the first Agriculture Labour Income Enquiry report, the per capita annual income of agriculture labour in 1950-51 was around Rs. 104 per person and many agriculture labour were unemployed.

Dr. Ambedkar's concept for reform of the condition of landless labour was related to his idea of a modern enhanced society which included the three magical words, liberty, equality and fraternity. First, he wants that labour should be treated as

resource and capital for nation-building. He suggests for the “superfluous employment for agriculture labour” it meant that a large population of agriculture labour who were not performing any productive activity should be given employment in the proper direction for better results. He suggest to increased capital by the use of labour resources as a capital. He argued that,

*“Even if we go for intensive cultivation by using more capital (and all the equipment) with a given plot of land so as to increase production, would it not happen that agriculture will require even lesser labour than before? even if we enlarged the existing holdings and procure capital and capital goods to make hem economic ,we will not only advocating the proper remedy but will end in aggravating the evils by adding to our stock of idle labour; for capitalistic agriculture will not need as many hands as are now required by our present day methods of cultivation”.*¹⁵

For agriculture labours Dr. Ambedkar explains about the definition of ‘Idle Labour’ as we discussed above. He wanted to provide a real wage for all labour class for the activity of production. He said that in the agriculture sector most of the labour is non-productive or as idle labour. For the estimation of these idle labours, he was

followed by Sir James Caird who stated in 1884 and explained about England’s labour. His explanation was based on the demand of labour per squire of land with compare to contemporary participation of labour in agriculture field (nearly 2/3 were labour but estimated allowing one third to be taken up). Due to the increasing of ruralisation in India and continually decreasing proportion of land under cultivation, the volume of idle labour must have increased. So that pressure of land was one of the reasons for subdivision of land in British India. He was very well described to bind to give rising the arming of landless labour.

Abolition of Khoti System and Mahar Watan

The khoti system was one type of zamindari and the persons whose called khot had few property rights in which he can charge land revenue from farmers under his khots. One part of this khot was given to the government. It differed from ordinary ryotwari because they were worked as a post for revenue collection under this system the farmer's condition became just like bonded labour because khots were exploited these labours. At the first time Dr. Ambedkar raise his voice against khoti system on agriculture meet (14 April 1929)

in Chiplud (Ratnagiri) and after some time he introduced a bill for the abolition of khoti system for the removal of exploitation and to make poor farmers direct under governmental system of ryotwari system by the agriculture revenue act of 1879. On September 17, 1937, Dr. Ambedkar introduced this bill in Bombay Legislative Council for the abolition of khoti system in Konkan area of Maharashtra. It sought to establish a direct relationship between them and the government and made the provision of paying reasonable compensation to the khots to give those inferior holders who were in actual occupation of land the status of occupation within the meaning of land revenue land.¹⁶ The demand for minimum wage for agriculture labourers and also cutoff irrigation charge up to 50 % was the other aspects for this movement to remove khoti system. It was abolished in 1949.

Under hereditary rules, Mahar was appointed as lower grade service but they served as multitasking and all-time worker for the English government. Mahar Watan was related to the following governmental department like irrigation department, vaccination department revenue department, education department, local self-government department, police department, excise department etc. Mahar Watan was a

traditional bad evil in Maharashtra and a big quantity of rural population were suffered from this. They were treated as a servant and did labour works. Mostly they got a small piece of land as the salary of the service called watan and also got the right to collect 'baloot' from villagers it means "the collection of grains" but only on the year of good production of crops. This was only a symbolic right as zamindari but in actuality, it was one type of exploitation method of poor peoples. Dr. Ambedkar wrote a series about this evil in his weekly 'Bahiskrat Bharat' and made aware to poor peoples and said that they are always under control of high caste officers and they were not punished by English government officers but mostly punished by his high caste Hindu officers. Baloot was choice based payment by villagers so they did not collect it forcibly. Mahar's found their baloot only that condition when they did never beaked the social customs made for untouchables.¹⁷ Dr. Ambedkar takes an Amendment bill for the hereditary act of 1874. He argued to review and predetermine the value of Mahar Watan land and to give full freedom for leaving the service. He introducing the Bill presented the figures of remuneration by Watandar Mahars which was few annas to few rupees. On March 19, 1928, he introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislative

Assembly to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, 1874. After 8 years 17 September 1937 another bill was presented by Dr. Ambedkar. After his nirvana, it was abolished in 1959 by the act of Bombay Inferior Village Watan Abolition Act.

Analysis of problems and the solution given by Dr. Ambedkar were both fabulous because he dogged deep from the social evils and about the relation between social customaries and economic progress. He explained that the problems were not only within the economic circumstances but had a connection with the situation of the peasants and landless labours. He was clearly in favor of India's industrialization as a remedy for the problems of agriculture. He wants to considered industrialization as a necessary part of the Indian economy. But in India, it's not an insufficient condition for consolidation of agricultural landholding. He was in favor of consolidation of land because It would remove the pressure of population on agriculture and increase the amount of capital goods, it will forcibly creates the economic necessity of enlarging the holdings. According to him legislation is not only remedied to implement rules to find an economic holding because it may because of many social evils. He also knew that human resource should also be used for

development. He believes that 'state-socialism' is essential for the rapid industrialization and inclusive growth both.

References

1. Babasaheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, Writing and Speeches, Maharashtra Government, Education Department, vol.2, 1979, p-91.
2. Deo Prakash, Socio-economic Thoughts of B.R. Ambedkar, Manak Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p-101.
3. Ibid, p.473.
4. Babasaheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, Writing and Speeches, Maharashtra Government, Education Department, vol.1, 1989, p-459-60.
5. Babasaheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, Writing and Speeches, Maharashtra Government, Education Department, vol.1, 1989, p.470.
6. Radhakamal Mukharjee, Land Problem In India, Longman Green Co. Ltd., 1933, p.1.
7. Ibid, p.459.
8. Ibid, p.462.

9. Ibid, p.459.
10. Ibid, p.467.
11. Ibid, p.431.
12. Radha kamal mukharjee, The Founder of Indian Economics, Longman Green Co. Landon, 1916, p-59.
13. GS Lokhande, Bheemrao Ramjee Ambedkar: A Study in Social Demography, Intellectual publishing House, 1982, p-231-32.
14. Deo Prakash, Socio-Economic Thoughts of B.R. Ambedkar, Manak Publication pvt.ltd., 2004, p-148.
15. Babasaheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, Writing and Speeches, Maharashtra Government, Education Department, vol-1, 1989, p- 477.
16. Ibid, p-102.
17. Babasaheb Bheem Rao Ambedkar, Writing and Speeches, Maharashtra Government, Education Department, Vol. 18, 1989, pp-85-99.