B R Ambedkar laid the foundation for workers’ rights, social security in India

Part of: GS-II- Governance – Rights (PT-MAINS-PERSONALITY TEST)

International Labour Day is celebrated on May 1 to honour workers. Labour has an undeniable role in shaping the nation’s fortune. Since the times immemorial, the working class has struggled and sacrificed for greater causes — first for Independence and then building the nation brick by brick. The ongoing fight against COVID-19 has brought temporary hardship for everyone, including workers.

Many leaders have been a beacon for workers and B R Ambedkar was one among them.

1. As the representative of the Depressed Classes in the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar forcefully pleaded for living wages, decent working conditions and the freedom of peasants from the clutches of cruel landlords.
2. He also fought for the removal of social evils that blighted the lives of the downtrodden.
3. He went on to form the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936 with a comprehensive programme to meet the needs and grievances of the landless, poor tenants, agriculturists, and workers.

On September 17, 1937, during the Poona session of the Bombay Assembly, he introduced a bill to abolish the Khoti system of land tenure in Konkan. He opposed the introduction of Industrial Disputes Bill, 1937 because it removed the workers’ right to strike. His profound knowledge of labour matters was universally acknowledged and demonstrated during his term as Labour member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council from 1942 to 1946.

The Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Bill, introduced by Ambedkar on November 8, 1943, compelled the employers to acknowledge trade unions.

Ambedkar did not accept the Marxist position that the abolition of private property would bring an end to poverty and suffering “Communists say that they have not destroyed other valuable end in the process of achieving Equality. How many people have they killed for achieving their end? Has human life no value? Could they not have taken property without taking the life of the owner?”

On February 8, 1944, in the legislative assembly during the debate on the Lifting of Ban on Employment of Women on Underground Work in Coal Mines, Ambedkar said: “It is for the first time that I think in any industry the principle has been established of equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex.” It was a historic moment. Through the Mines Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill 1943, he empowered women workers with maternity benefits.

Addressing the Indian Labour Conference held in New Delhi on November 26, 1945, Ambedkar emphasised the urgent need to bring progressive labour welfare legislation

Inspired by Ambedkar, the current government has taken steps to improve the quality of life of workers. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojna was launched in February 2019 to ensure protection of unorganised workers in their old age.
Through technological interventions like Shram Suvidha Portal, transparency and accountability are ensured in the enforcement of labour law.

The government is working to simplify, amalgamate and rationalise the provisions of the existing central labour laws into four labour codes — Labour Code on Wages, on Industrial Relations, on Social Security & Welfare and on Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions.

In the extraordinary circumstances brought on by the COVID pandemic, the labour fraternity deserves a special salute. During his Mann ki Baat broadcast on March 29, the PM apologised for the inconvenience. As we recall the innumerable contribution of the countless labourers in nation-building, with an ever-increasing spirit of Shramev Jayate, we must remember the contributions of Ambedkar.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of Labour and Employment in February 2019. It was launched at Vastral in Gujarat. PM-SYM is the world's largest pension scheme. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan is a central government scheme that is introduced for old age protection and social security of Unorganised Workers (UW).

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The Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme which aims to provide security and protection to the unorganised workers as well as to the old age group.

The scheme is meant to benefit workers in the unorganised sector and this includes street vendors, rickshaw pullers and agricultural workers, mid-day meal workers, construction workers or workers in similar other occupations. There are an estimated 42 crore such unorganised workers in the country. Under this scheme, the beneficiary after attaining the age of 60 years would receive an assured monthly pension of Rs 3000/- per month and 50% of the pension shall be entitled to the spouse as family pension after the death of the beneficiary.

Some of the benefits provided to the beneficiary under this scheme are mentioned below:

- They are provided with an assured monthly pension where each beneficiary will receive a minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- If the beneficiary dies during the receipt of the pension, 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary shall be entitled to the spouse as family pension.
- If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and died due to any cause (before the age of 60 years), his/her spouse will be entitled to join and continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or exit the scheme as per provisions of exit and withdrawal.

Who is eligible under the PM-SYM Scheme?

To be eligible under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan Dhan, the candidate should fulfil the below-mentioned criteria:

- He/she should be an unorganised worker (UW) aged between 18 years to 40 years.
- He/she should have a monthly income of Rs. 15,000 or below.
He/she should possess an Aadhar card along with a Savings Bank Account/Jan Dhan account number with IFSC.

Any individual who is engaged in the Organised Sector (membership of EPF/NPS/ESIC) and is an income tax payer will not be eligible to apply for the PM-SYM Scheme.

How to enrol for PM-SYM?

The eligible member will be required to have a savings bank account, mobile phone, and Aadhaar number before enrolling under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan Dhan.

- He/she may visit the nearest Common Services Centres (CSC eGovernance Services India Limited) or Life Insurance Corporation, ESIC/EPFO and all Labour offices of Central and State Governments to get enrolled for PM-SYM using Aadhaar number and savings bank account/Jan-Dhan account number on a self-certification basis.
- The beneficiary can also visit the PM-SYM web portal and self-register using the Aadhar number/savings bank account/Jan-Dhan account number on a self-certification basis.
- The enrollment process is carried out by various enrollment agencies known as Common Services Centres. The UW groups can visit their nearest CSC along with their documents and get registered for the PM-SYM Scheme.
- Life Insurance Corporation, ESIC/EPFO and all Labour offices of Central and State Governments will facilitate the unorganised workers about the benefits and enrollment procedure of the PM-SYM Scheme.