

DEMOCRACY AS CONCEIVED BY DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

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Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was one of the most memorable sons of India, who did a lot for the upliftment and well-being of the Scheduled Castes in India. He appeared on the Indian socio-political scene in early 1920s and remained in the forefront of all social, economic, political and religious efforts for upliftment of the Untouchables, who were considered to be the lowest stratum of the Indian society. People with love used to call him Babasaheb. He was a great scholar who made outstanding contributions as an economist, sociologist, legal luminary, educationalist, journalist, Parliamentarian and above all, as a social reformer and champion of human rights.

After Independence, Dr. Ambedkar became the first Law Minister of India. Dr. Ambedkar not only strongly recommended democracy as the 'governing principle of human relationship' but also emphasized on principles of equality, liberty and fraternity which are the cornerstones of democracy. According to Baba Saheb, the object of framing the Constitution is two-fold: (1) To lay down the form of political democracy, and (2) To lay down that our ideal is economic democracy and also to prescribe that every Government whatever is in power shall strive to bring about economic democracy. He also suggested that these directive principles should not be interpreted narrowly in terms of the political rights alone.

Dr. Ambedkar was regarded as the Architect of India's constitution, and he was the chairman of the constitution drafting committee on 29th August, and charged by the Assembly to write free India's new Constitution. The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes.

Ambedkar's philosophy is embedded in all social, religious and moral considerations. The crucial point of his philosophy is the oppressed and the depressed living in India. The philosophy aims at giving life to those who are disowned, at uplifting those who are suppressed and downtrodden and granting liberty, equality and justice to all irrespective of their castes. I would quote Dr. Ambedkar's thought regarding Freedom, which is as follows:

“ Ours is a battle for freedom, ours is a battle not just for economical gains and political power, ours is a battle for reclamation of human personality which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social order and continue to be suppressed and mutilated”.

Unquote. Dr. Ambedkar also emphasised on the social and economic scope of democracy. According to Dr. Ambedkar political democracy cannot succeed, in the absence of social and economic democracy in the country. He gave a new look to the objective of economic democracy by incorporating the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. For him freedom without equality, democracy and equality without freedom could lead to absolute dictatorship.

Ambedkar viewed democracy as an instrument of bringing about a change in the country peacefully. Democracy does not merely mean rule by the majority or government by the representatives of the people and now this is only viewed as a formalistic and limited concept of democracy. One would understand the meaning of democracy in a better way if we view it as a way of realizing extreme changes in the social and economic spheres of the society. According to Ambedkar the associated life is consensual appearance of shared experience, aspirations and values, and if a small section of the society is allowed to manipulate the cultured symbols of the society that process will result in undemocratic and destructive conditions in the country.

Ambedkar finds reasons for the failure of parliamentary democracy that 'parliamentary democracy gives no free hand to dictatorship and that is why it became a discredited institution in the countries like Italy, Spain and Germany which readily welcomed dictatorships'¹ Ambedkar's idea of democracy goes beyond the scheme of government, as its emphasis is more on the need for bringing about an all-round democracy in India. If one observes the scheme of government, he will obviously come to know that the scheme of

government does not exist in vacuum; but it operates within the society and its worth depends upon its relationship with the other spheres of society.

I would quote Abraham Lincoln:

“As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy”

There are various philosophers, political scientists and writers who have given numerous definitions of democracy and have also tried to add their own new meanings to it. Dr Ambedkar who is known as a relentless champion of human rights and staunch believer in democracy, says:

“Democracy is not a form of government, but a form of social organization.”

The formal institutions of democracy are Elections, Political Parties and Parliaments and they cannot be effective in an undemocratic atmosphere. According to Ambedkar political democracy is not an end in itself, but the most powerful means to achieve the social and economic ideals in society. He felt that there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than existed in the former. ‘Social and economic democracy are tissue and the fibre of a political democracy. The tougher the tissue and the fiber, the greater the strength of the body.’² Political democracy means the principle of ‘one man one vote’ which indicates political equality of the masses in India. It is rightly said that a Democratic government should be an extension of a democratic society. Real democracy cannot operate powerfully in the presence of caste-based inequalities and other political malpractices. Democracy is a spirit of fraternity and equality and not just merely a political arrangement in India.

According to Dr. Ambedkar for the successful working of democracy there must not be glaring inequalities in the society such as an oppressed class, a suppressed class. There should be opportunity for equality rather than having equality of opportunity in the country to experience Democracy in real sense. Dr Ambedkar firmly believed that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy which is clearly identical in his talk given on the Voice of America he argued that:

“Democracy could not be equated with either republic or parliamentary form of government. The roots of democracy lay not in the form of government, parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is a model of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of the associated life between the people who form the society.”

Dr Ambedkar strongly believed that in democracy revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed. In other sense democracy might peacefully bring about positive revolutionary changes in the country and will gain the support of the government and the people as well. There were certain conditions to be fulfilled to experience democracy which is as follows:

- There should not be glaring inequalities in society, that is, privilege for one class;
- The existence of an opposition;
- Equality in law and administration;
- Observance of constitutional morality;
- No tyranny of the majority;
- Moral order of society and
- Public conscience.

The success of a democracy in India can be ensured only by establishing a truly democratic society. Ambedkar favored the parliamentary form of government and for the successful functioning of this form of government, political parties are necessary for the effective working of parliamentary democracy. This will ensure existence of the opposition which is very important. Along with the social foundations of democracy, Ambedkar takes into consideration the economic aspects as well.

Parliamentary democracy, in which he had great faith, was also critically examined by him. He argued that parliamentary democracy was based on liberalism and it ignored the economic inequalities and never concentrated upon the problems of the downtrodden. In other words, parliamentary democracy emphasised only liberty whereas true democracy implies both liberty and equality. Indian society was demanding freedom from the Britishers but Ambedkar was afraid that freedom of the nation would not ensure real freedom for all the

people as there were social and economic inequalities which were being practices in great zeal. This practice has dehumanized the Indian society and establishing democracy in such a society would be an effort to bring about a revolution in the Country. This revolution in real sense would be seen in the social structure and attitudes of the people in the country. The principles of brotherhood and equality must be established in the place of hereditary inequality. Therefore one can witness that, Ambedkar supported the idea of all-round democracy rather than liberalism alone.

Parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and didn't care to examine the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract, in spite of the fact that they were unequal in bargaining power. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to economic wrongs of the poor, downtrodden and disinherited class.³ The second wrong ideology which has vitiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy'.⁴ He illustrated this point by comparing the collapse of parliamentary democracy in the countries of Italy, Germany and Russia with England and USA.

Ambedkar felt that self government and democracy become real when the governing class loses its power to capture the power to govern. In some of the countries the servile classes may succeed in ousting the governing class from the seat of authority with just by adult suffrage. In some other countries the governing class may be so deeply entrenched that the servile classes will need other safeguards besides adult suffrage to achieve the same end.⁵ Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and didn't even strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result the liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and farce.

Democracy means rule of the majority but this should not result into dictatorship of the majority. According to Dr.Ambedkar the majority must always respect the views of the minority. In India there is a possibility that the minority community will always be a political minority also, therefore, it is very essential that the minority must feel free, safe and secure in the country. They should have a sense of belongingness in the country; otherwise, it will be very easy to convert democracy into a permanent rule against the minority. According to

Dr. Ambedkar, a minority does not become the victim of the tyranny of the majority in democracy and he also had suggested certain safeguards which will act as a protective force for the minority.

Dr. Ambedkar, was the leader of the untouchables, belonging to the minority group. He represented all his sufferings through his own bitter experiences of untouchability. His philosophy was such as would facilitate the social revolution in India.⁶ He perhaps, the only leader born among the scheduled caste people, who tried to unite the untouchables and create a semblance of unity.⁷

Dr. Ambedkar's patriotism started with the upliftment of the downtrodden and the poor. He fought for their equality and rights. Democracy can be successful only when every citizen feels duty bound to fight injustice even if that injustice does not put him into any difficulty. This will happen when equality and brotherhood exist in the society. To make democracy successful in India, Dr. Ambedkar suggested a few other precautions also. Caste system could thus become the most difficult obstacle in the successful functioning of democracy. The castes which are supposed to be of low status will never get their proper share in power. Caste will create barriers in the development of healthy democratic traditions. This means that unless we achieve the task of establishing democracy in the social field, mere political democracy cannot survive. Dr. Ambedkar in his book *Annihilation of Caste* puts forward the various reasons why he rejected Hinduism.⁸ He believed that Hinduism was based on the caste system, and the real method of breaking up the caste system is 'to destroy the religious notions on which caste system is founded'.⁹

Dr. Ambedkar advocated democracy in every field: social, economic and political. For him social Justice meant maximum happiness to the maximum number of people. In a speech which Ambedkar made on 18th March, 1955, he outlined three objects in life: 1) to spread education, 2) to give more representation to the untouchables, and 3) to improve the condition of untouchables in village.¹⁰ Dr. Ambedkar was a futuristic and a man of ideals. He was a strong believer in Democracy, which can be clearly identical from his encouraging speech at the All India Depressed Classes Conference:

“It seems to me that there lies on us a very important duty to see that democracy does not vanish from the earth as the governing principle of

human relationship. If we believe in it, we must both be true and loyal to it. We must not only be staunch in our faith in democracy but we must resolve to see that whatever we do not help the enemies of democracy to uproot the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.”

In a Democratic government there should be an extension of a democratic society. In the Indian society, as long as the caste barriers and caste-based inequalities exist, the real democracy cannot operate, which means democracy is a spirit of fraternity and equality and not merely a political arrangement. According to Dr. Ambedkar success of democracy in India can be only ensured by establishing a truly democratic society. However, it is sure that the efforts of Ambedkar were necessarily responsible for this mass awakening but it was also indirectly produced by other movements directed against the British rule.¹¹ The hidden social discrimination, however, which its origin in the traditions and upbringing of the Indian people still remains and will only change when attitudes change.¹²

Amidst wide ranging diversities of climate, ethnicity, language, religion, local and religious traditions, dress, food habits and vocations our people must be helped by educational institutions to appreciate the value of the national unity of India that permeates all its diversities. People have to learn and respect concepts of socialism, democracy and the rule of law. They must be helped to realize the importance of their duty to contribute to the national weal and of having an unshakeable moral foundation for personal, social and national endeavour.¹³ It is rightly said that social unity can be achieved by coercive methods and to experience the true democracy to flower and flourish in India, without social union is impossible.

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Ambedkar's major concern for women's status has been reflected in the Hindu Code Bill. He has even remarked that his work on the Hindu Code Bill would be as important as his work on the Constitution itself. The bill itself was an immense exodus from Hinduism and its degrading set of laws regarding gender. We appreciate the efforts put in by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to fight the long and difficult battle towards the enactment of the Hindu Code Bills. [1] Only in Dayabhaga law, the woman was prescribed some sort of property rights while in Mitakshara law, she was ostracized absolutely. [2] By proposing the legalization of inter-caste marriage. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Quotes. 1,773 Followers · Public Figure. Buddhist Wisdom. PagesOtherBrandWebsiteNews & Media WebsiteAmbedkar QuotesVideosBabasaheb Ambedkar's interview "Democracy in India" by BBC. [Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 13, p. 326]. After explaining why he was not in favour of inclusion of the word socialism, he himself explained that in other ways the Constitution has already embodied the socialist principles: "apart from the Fundamental Rights, which we have embodied in the Constitution, we have also introduced other sections, which deal with directive principles of State policy. If anything can be conceived as ideologically opposite to Ambedkar, it would rather be globalization. Globalization and Dalits. As regards democracy, it has only remained in its symbolic façade of elections, offering little real choice to people. Outside elections, there is no space for people to express their opinion or dissent. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the Savior of Labor Rights in India. Many less people in India have the knowledge about What Dr. Ambedkar had done for them. Following are the services provided by Dr. Ambedkar as a Labor Minister and as the Labor Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council between 1942 and 1946. - Reduction of Working Hours from 12 to 8 Hrs. - Employment Exchange. Dr. Ambedkar was invited by the Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore to preside over the Conference. Dr. Ambedkar prepared his historical speech. 'The Annihilation of Caste'. The conference was cancelled by the Mandal on the ground that Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts were revolutionary. Finally, Dr. Ambedkar refused to preside and published his speech in book form in 1937. 1936. Dr Ambedkar contested the By-Election for Lok Sabha from Bhandara Constituency of Vidarbha Region but was defeated Congress Candidate Mr Borkar. 1953. May.