

## **POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR: VIEWS ON DEMOCRACY**

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### **Abstract**

*Democracy is a form and a method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the social life are brought about without bloodshed - Ambedkar*

*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a prominent political thinker of our times. His political philosophy associates with the grand political streams such as liberalism, conservatism, Marxism and communitarianism. At the same time he differentiates himself with these dominant political traditions in his own authentic and indigenous way. Ambedkar's philosophy is essentially ethical and religious. For him, social precedes the political. Social morality is the central to his political philosophy. His conception of democracy internalizes the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in its true spirit. For him, democracy was the end and the means of this ideal. It was the end because he ultimately considered democracy as coterminous with the realization of liberty, equality and fraternity. At the same time, democracy was also the means through which this ideal was to be achieved. Ambedkar says: "Democracy is not a form of government, but a form of social organization. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of the associated life between the people who form the society". This paper will discuss about Dr. Ambedkar's political philosophy with special reference to democracy.*

**Key words:** Political Philosophy, Equality, Liberty, Fraternity, Society, Democracy and Government.

### **Introduction**

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of the front-ranking nation-

builders of modern India. Ambedkar has in his own way, made significant contributions to the contemporary political ideas. In course of his public life over three decades, Ambedkar was fully convinced that politics should be the instrument to fight for justice in adorning all sections of the Indian people with freedom. As such, he tirelessly worked towards the goal of justice for the untouchables in an unjust society, mainly through political means. In the course of these activities, Ambedkar developed his own ideas about society and politics of the contemporary India. Viewed from the subject of political science, those ideas obviously merit attention.

Ambedkar was influenced by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three grand traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, conservative and radical. The unique feature about him is that he has transcended all these traditions. He was influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, the pragmatic American and the teacher of him. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman had considerable impact on his thought. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative thinker of British, though; we can't brand Ambedkar as conservative. Ambedkar's notion of liberty comes close to T.H. Green.

Ambedkar's philosophy is primarily ethical and religious. He thoroughly explored the Indian traditions and its philosophical systems in a unique way. He developed political concepts like democracy, justice, state and rights from his understanding of Indian society and the functioning of its institutions on the moral grounds. The core of political thinking of Ambedkar is contained in two of his statements- the rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of society, and a democratic form of government presupposes a democratic form of society. He considers democracy essentially as a form of society of a more associated living and a social conscience is the only safe guard of all rights. "The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationships, in terms of associated life among the people who form a society".<sup>1</sup> For him, social relationships are the key to democracy. Ambedkar is a social democrat in spirit and practice. His special contribution to political thought lies in his linking up liberty, equality and fraternity to the concept

of social democracy, which in turn, he relates to democracy as a form of government.

### **Ambedkar on Democracy**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is known as staunch protagonist of Democracy in his belief and action. Many thinkers have given many definitions and meaning of democracy. But the fact is Democracy is not merely a form of Government but it is a way of life.

The most popular definition of Democracy is given by Abraham Lincoln as, *“Democracy as Government of the people by the people and for the people.”*<sup>2</sup>

According to Walter Bagehot Democracy is a, *“Government by discussion”*.<sup>3</sup>

Ambedkar defines democracy in a much more concrete way. He says, *“Democracy is a form and a method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed”*.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar further defined Democracy as, *“Democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society”*.<sup>5</sup>

According to Ambedkar, democracy means fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the acceptance of those changes by the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed. He wanted to establish the principle of one man, one vote and one value not only in the political life of India but also in social and economic life. He wanted political democracy to be accompanied by social democracy. He gave central importance to social aspects of democracy over political aspects, unlike many others whose discourse on democracy is confined to the political and institutional aspects. Ambedkar paid greater attention to social linkage among people than separation of powers and constitutional safeguards for democracy. The concept of power contained in his thinking has a direct relationship between social power and political power. He was conscious of the social and economic inequalities which corrode the national consciousness of the Indian people. Ambedkar said, “We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the lease of it social

democracy”.

Ambedkar paid serious attention to religious notions that promote democracy. Ambedkar viewed the religious foundation of caste as the fundamental obstacle to democracy in India on the one hand and the Buddhist doctrine of liberally, equality and fraternity as the foundations for democracy on the other hand. Ambedkar thinks of democracy from the viewpoint of practical life. He belongs to the realistic school of political scientists. He is not bothered about the principles and theories of political science. He aspired for having a government of the people, for the people and by the people. According to Ambedkar, democracy means no slavery, no caste, no coercion. He wants free thoughts that choice and capacity to live and let live, which his conscience, would be the right path to democracy. Ambedkar says “Democracy is a mode 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”.

Ambedkar says, “If you give education to the lower strata of the Indian society which is interested in blowing up the caste systems, the caste system will be blown up”.<sup>6</sup> Giving education to those who want to blow up caste system will improve prospect of democracy in India and put democracy in safer hands.

### **Parliamentary Democracy**

According to Ambedkar, “parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular Government, a government of the people, by the people and for the people”. “In parliamentary democracy, there is the Legislature to express the voice of the people; there is the Executive which is subordinate to the Legislature and bound to obey the Legislature. Over and above the Legislature and the Executive there is the Judiciary to control both and keep them both within prescribed bounds”.<sup>7</sup>

Ambedkar says, “Parliamentary democracy has not been at a standstill. It was progressed in three directions. *Firstly*, it began with equality of political rights by expanding in the form of equal suffrage. *Secondly*, it has recognized the principle of equality of social and economic opportunities. *Thirdly*, it has recognized that the state cannot be held at bay by corporation which is anti-social in their purpose”.<sup>8</sup>

Parliamentary democracy produces the best result in the long run, because it assigns great significance to virtues like ability and cooperation, mutual respect and self help, discipline and devotion to work, for the happiness of the millions of people. The system of parliamentary democracy, thus, embodies the principle of change and continuity to which Ambedkar attaches great importance. To him, only the spirit of the people can help parliamentary democracy to function well. People and democracy are closely related to each other. Ambedkar says, democracy is another name for equality. The result is the parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs of the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class.

Ambedkar says, “the wrong ideology which has initiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy. Some way question this proposition. To those who are disposed to question it, I will ask a counter question. Why parliamentary democracy collapsed so easily in Italy, Germany and Russia ? Why did it not collapses so easily in England and the U.S.A? To any mind, there is only one answer – namely, there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than it existed in the former. Social and Economic democracy are the tissues and the fiber of a political democracy. The tougher the tissue and fiber, the greater the strength of the body. Democracy is another name for equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavor to strike a balance between liberty and equality, which the result that liberty swallowed equality and has left a progeny of inequalities”.<sup>9</sup>

He says, under the democratic system of government only we could ensure equally socio-economic, political and religious freedom to every man and woman. Ambedkar’s ultimate aim of life was to create a “real social democracy”.

### **Political Democracy**

According to Ambedkar, political democracy rests on four premises. They are:

- i) “The individual is an end in himself.
- ii) The individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution.
- iii) The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege.
- iv) The state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.”<sup>10</sup>

All these points are absolutely important in Democracy. Thus according to Dr. Ambedkar the main objective of Democratic Government should be the welfare of individuals. The dignity of the individual, political liberty, social progress and human rights are necessary constitutional safeguards which form Ambedkar’s basic decent democratic ideals in the political democracy. To him, the ground plan means the social structure of a community to which the political plan is sought to be applied. Political democracy and liberty are nothing if not beaked and bucked up by equal social patterns, because the political structure rests on the social structure. “Indeed, the social structure,” he says “has a profound effect on the political structure. It may modify it in its working. It may nullify it or it may even make a cherry of it.” It is therefore, essential that before passing any Judgment on any scheme of political relationship even making plans for economic reforms, the people must consider the ground plan that means social relations; Democracy should be regarded as both a social and a political method.

“The soul of Democracy”, he says, “is the doctrine of one man, one value”. This principle finds intrinsic worth in the individual personality of each man in political and social relation. This stands for the economic well being of the people, without which democracy, to him, has no value.” The sum of democracy, according to him, essentially consists in the economic welfare of all men living in a particular society, besides its realization in political relation. Otherwise, democracy would kill its own soul and democracy without soul would be useless, unrelated to human aspirations.

### **Conditions precedent for the successful working of modern Democracy**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had very explicitly stated the conditions which are very much necessary for the successful working of democracy. They can be stated in brief as under.

1. *There must be no glaring inequalities in the society* – He says, “there must not be an oppressed and suppressed class. There must not be a class which has got all the privileges and a class which has got all the burdens to carry. Such a thing, such a division, such an organization of a society has within itself the germs of a bloody revolution, and perhaps it would be impossible for the democracy to cure them”.<sup>11</sup>

2. *The existence of Opposition* – For Ambedkar, “Democracy means a veto of power. Democracy requires that not only that the Government should be subject to the veto, long term veto of five years, at the hands of the people, but there must be an immediate veto. For this, there must be an Opposition in the Parliament to challenge the Government”.<sup>12</sup>

3. *Equality in law and administration* - There must be not only equality before Law, but there must be equality of treatment in administration.

The administration must be well responsive, responsible and impartial; and it must be well determined. It should command obedience to authority, “We must have a Government,” he said,” in which the men in power will give their undivided allegiance to the best interest of the country. We must have a Government in which men in power, knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for.”<sup>13</sup>

4. *Constitutional Morality* - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that, “A Constitution which contains legal provisions, is only skeleton. The flesh of the skeleton is to be found in what we call constitutional morality.”<sup>14</sup> According to Dr. Ambedkar Constitution is important for success of democracy but more important was constitutional morality in polity and society.



5. *No Tyranny of majority* – Ambedkar says, “there is one other thing which is very necessary in the working of Democracy, and it is this that in the name of democracy there must be no tyranny of the majority over the minority. The minority must always feel safe that although the majority is carrying on the Government, the minority is not being hurt, or the minority is not being hit below the belt”<sup>15</sup>

6. *Moral order* - Dr. Ambedkar said, “A politician does not merely trade in politics, but he also represents a particular faith covering both the method as well as the metaphysics of politics.” He further said that, Politics has become a kind of sewage system intolerably, Unsavory and insanitary. To become a politician is like going to work in drain. According to Dr. Ambedkar Politics is the key of all emancipation. Therefore he asked depressed classes to capture political power. For realization of Social democracy in true spirit, he emphasized for moral order in Politics just because he wanted Democracy to be implemented in true sense.

7. *Public Conscience* - According to Dr. Ambedkar Public Conscience means, “Conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer; and it means that everybody whether he suffers that particular wrong or not is prepared to join him in order to get him relieved.” Dr. Ambedkar considered the condition but public conscience as essential condition for successful working of democracy because without public conscience democracy cannot be successful. It is the will of the people that makes healthy democratic atmosphere.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted Social democracy to cherish in India. He said very categorically Political Democracy cannot be successful unless there lies at the base of it of Social democracy. He warned the nation in this direction that, “on the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into the life of contradictions. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man, one vote and one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason if our social and economic structure continues to deny the principle of one man, one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest



possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political Democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.”

Dr. Ambedkar was of opinion that political Democracy must change its form to social Democracy in order to develop state socialism.

### **Conclusion**

Dr. Ambedkar had unshakeable faith in democracy. In his conception of exploitation less society, democracy has an extra-ordinary role which he defined as ‘one person, one vote’; and ‘one vote, one value’. Democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to her/him, democracy means liberty, equality and fraternity - Ambedkar's definition of democracy had such a tone. He defined parliamentary democracy as "voting by the people in favour of their owners and handing over the rights of ruling over themselves". His conception of democracy appears to be purely people oriented. He showed that the bookish concepts of equality are detrimental to the disabled sections of society in the prevailing social setting and proposed a fundamental change in the concept of equality. It envisaged complete abolition of inequality. His principle of positive discrimination is based on this very concept of equality.

Dr. Ambedkar firmly believed that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy. In his concept of democracy, he opined that political democracy is not an end in itself, but the most powerful means to achieve the social and economic ideals in society. It is necessary to stress that his greatness lies in the radicalism of his conceptions, his vision of a human society sans any kind of exploitation; not in the remedies or apparatus he proposed in the circumstances prevailing in his time. Thus, *Ambedkarism* is of great relevance to Indian society even today in achieving social justice, removal of untouchability, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy. Democratic socialism is the key note of his political thought and constitutionalism is the only way to achieve it.

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