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Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and His Philosophy on Indian Democracy

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of the study is to analyze and evaluate critically the idea of B.R.Ambedkar, the great Indian constitution maker, regarding Indian democracy and to capture the position of Ambedkar on issues whose relevance is even felt at present. Analyzing the idea of democracy of Ambedkar in details, it can be found out that 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. This research gives closer and analytical insight into the thoughts of Ambedkar and provides an answer to the question of whether we, the Indian, achieve religious tolerance, human equality and freedom, true democracy, gender respect in the society, justice and peace in the light of political philosophy of Ambedkar whose memory will ever guide the nation on the path of justice, liberty and equality.

Keywords: Democracy, Constitution, Judicial Decisions

INTRODUCTION

Ambedkar had a long conversation on democratic form of government in his literatures. His conception of democracy is different from the parliamentary democracy of Western Europe. Democracy came with the principles of liberalism. Parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular government, a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Ambedkar considered the problems and articulated displeasure against the parliamentary democracy in nations like Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain and some other European nations in proposing the

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parliamentary democracy in India. Ambedkar explored grounds for the let-down of parliamentary democracy that parliamentary democracy gives no free hand to repression and that is why it became a disgraced institution in the countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany which readily welcomed dictatorships (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). The nations that were opposing dictatorship and vowed to democracy to find their discontent with democracy. First, parliamentary democracy began with equality of political rights in the form of equal suffrage.

Some countries have parliamentary democracy that has not accepted adult suffrage. It has progressed by growing the notion of equality of political rights to equality of social and economic opportunity. It has documented that companies, which are anti-social in purpose, cannot hold the state at bay. With all this, 'the reason for dissatisfaction is due to the understanding that it has unsuccessful to assure to the people for the right to liberty, property or the chase of pleasure. The causes for this failure may be found either in incorrect system or wrong organization or in both (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). He expounded this point by indicating the fault with both wrong ideologies and bad organization in following the ideals of democracy.

Ambedkar's conception of democracy does not focus any class structure in society, because in class structure breeds tyranny, vanity, pride, arrogance, greed, selfishness, insecurity, poverty, degradation, loss of liberty, self-reliance, independence, dignity and self-respect. He was a political realist; therefore, he regarded democracy in its practical aspect as the social organisation of the people in the sense that the people included all members of society. Thus he remarked, "A democratic society must assure a life of leisure and culture to each one of its citizens". Man occupies the highest place in the scheme of animal existence because of his cultivated mind and it is culture that divides the brute from man. Therefore the aim of a democratic society must be to enable every person to lead a life of culture which means the cultivation of mind as distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants.

Dr. Ambedkar realized that the democracy in India was a product of the historical situation and a unique national experience. The course of democratic development must protect the values of individual liberty, fraternal relationship, and morality grounded in humanistic religious belief. He supported the ideas of Constitutional separation of religion and state, the provision of fundamental rights, and the assignment of important functions to the Judiciary for strengthening

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the roots of democracy in India. Through legal and institutional reforms and by changing the habits of the hearts and mind, the creative use of political resources like election, well-wishers and friends must usher in a new life for the weaker sections of our society. For him, the purpose of modern democracy was to being about the welfare of the people.

REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY

Dr. Ambedkar's vision of democracy was closely related to his ideal of a "good society". He did not leave room for any ambiguity regarding the nature of this ideal. On many occasions, he stated that he envisaged a good society as one based on "liberty, equality and fraternity". Democracy, as he saw it, was both 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 attained.

Dr. Ambedkar's notion of "democratic government" went back to the fundamental idea of "government of the people, by the people and for the people". But "democracy" meant much more to him than democratic government. It was a way of life: "Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen."

Another crucial feature of Dr. Ambedkar's conception of democracy is that it was geared to social transformation and human progress. Conservative notions of democracy, such as the idea that it is mainly a device to prevent bad people from seizing power, did not satisfy him. In one of the most inspiring definitions of the term, he defined democracy as "a form and a method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed".

For this to happen, it was essential to link political democracy with economic and social democracy. Indeed, Dr. Ambedkar's vision of democracy was inseparable from his commitment to socialism. Sometimes he referred to this combined ideal as "social democracy", in a much wider sense than that in which the term is understood today. The neglect of economic democracy was, in his view, one of the chief causes of "the failure of democracy in Western Europe". As he put it: "The second wrong ideology that has vitiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social or economic

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democracy… Social and economic democracy is the tissues and the fibre of a political democracy. Democracy is another name for equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made 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, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and a farce." In this and other respects, his analysis of the fate of democracy in Western Europe largely applies to the Indian situation today.

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Democracy is understood to be a political instrument and where this political instrument exits, there is democracy. Democracy, as Ambedkar, points out is quite different from a Republic as well from Parliamentary Government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliament or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society. And the word 'Society' connotes one by its very nature. The qualities which accompany this unity are praiseworthy community of purpose and desire for welfare, loyalty to public ends and mutuality of sympathy and co-operation. To him all these ideals not to be found in 276 Indian societies because there are several factors that pause challenges to the democracy. And the challenges are as follow:

1. The Indian Society does not consist of individuals. It consists of an innumerable collection of castes with no bond of sympathy and having no common experience to share. The existence of the Caste system is a standing denial to the existence of ideals society and to the democracy. In his view, Indian Society so imbedded in the Caste system that everything is organized on the basis of caste. An Indian cannot eat or marry with an Indian simply because he or she does not belong to his or her caste. An Indian cannot touch an Indian because he or she does not belong to his or her caste. In politics and you can see caste reflected therein the field of industry. You will find that all the topmost men drawing the highest salary belong to the caste of the particular industrialist who owns the industry.

2. The Caste system accompanied by the principle of 'Graded Inequality' also put a great threat to democracy. Castes are not equal in their status. They are standing one above another. They are

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jealous of one another. It is an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. It destroys willing and helpful co-operation. Ambedkar views that Caste and Class system are different and in Class System there is no complete isolation as there is in the Caste System. The stimulus and response between two castes is only one-sides. The higher caste act in one recognized way and the lower caste must respond in one established way.

3. The fixation of occupation in caste system also cuts the very roots of democracy. That means one caste is bound to one occupation. Society is no doubt 277 stable organized when each individual is doing that for which he has been aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others; and that it is the business of society to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use. But a society to be democratic should open a way to use all the capacities of the individual.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL WORKING OF DEMOCRACY

Dr. Ambedkar while speaking on the subject of democracy in Poona gave importance on the "Conditions Precedent for the Successful Working of Democracy".

First Condition: According to Ambedkar the first condition precedent for the successful working of democracy is that there must be no glaring inequality in the society. There must not be an oppressed class. There must not be a 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 organisation of a society has within itself the germ of a bloody revolution, and perhaps it would be impossible for the democracy to cure them.

Second Condition: The second thing which a successful working of democracy requires is the existence of opposition. Democracy means a veto power. Democracy is a contradiction of hereditary authority or autocratic authority. Democracy means that at some stages somewhere there must be a veto on the 278 authority of those who are ruling the country. In autocracy there is no veto. But in democracy we have provided, that at every five years those who are in authority must go to the people and ask whether in the opinion of the people they are well qualified to be entrusted with power and authority to look after their interest, and mould their destiny, to defend them.

Third Condition: The third condition precedent for the success of democracy is equality in law and administration. One need not at this stage delight too much on equality before the law,

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although there might be cases here and there when there I no equality before the law. But what is important is equality of treatment in administration. It is quite possible for good many of you to imagine or recall cases 279 where a party Government is carrying on the administration for the benefit of the members of the party.

Fourth Condition: According to Dr. Ambedkar the fourth condition precedent for the successful working of democracy is the observance of Constitutional Morality. Many people seem to be very enthusiastic about the Constitution. Well, I am afraid, I am not. I am quite prepared to join that body of people who want to abolish the Constitution, at any rate to redraft it. But what we forget is that we have a Constitution which contains legal provisions, only a Skelton. The flesh of that Skelton is to be found in what we call Constitutional morality.

Fifth Condition: To Dr. Ambedkar there is another factor 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 feel always 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. You take our own Parliament where the members of the opposition are doing by constantly bringing in motions of censure or adjournment motions.

Sixth Condition: Dr. Ambedkar thinks that democracy does require the functioning of moral order in society. Somehow, our political scientists have never considered this aspect of democracy. Ethics is something separate from politics. You may learn politics and you may know nothing about ethics as though politics can work without ethics. To my mind it is an astounding proposition. After all, in democracy what happens? Democracy is spoken of as a free Government.

Lastly, Dr. Ambedkar viewed democracy requires 'public conscience'. There is no doubt about it that although there is injustice in every country, the injustice is not equally spread. There are some where the impact of injustice is very small. There are 281 small against whom the impact is very great. And there are some who are absolutely crushed under the burden of injustice. Dr. Ambedkar cited the examples of South Africa where those people are suffering are Indians. Even a large number of young boys' and girls' belonging to the White race are joining hand in the struggle of the Indians in South Africa. This is called "public conscience".

THINGS NECESSARY FOR MAINTENANCE OF DEMOCRACY

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By the time Dr. Ambedkar completed his observation on the Constitution of free India, his inner emotion arose to the extent that he came up with some of his reflections on the future of India. He reminded the House on 26 January 1950 that India would be an independent democratic country, according to which 'India from that day would have a government of the people, by the people and for the people'. For maintaining it, he suggested three things or devices. The following things were:

(1) Constitutional methods: The first thing, he suggested was to achieve social and economic objectives, we must only use Constitutional methods. It means, according to him 'we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil-disobedience, non-cooperation and Satyagraha. When there was no way left for Constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objective there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods.

(2) Not to lay liberties at the feet of a great man: the second thing Dr. Ambedkar suggested and also by referring to John Stuart Mill, gave a caution, who once said, not 'to lay their liberties at the feet of a great man, or to trust him with powers, which enables him to subvert their institutions. He further added that there is nothing wrong in being grateful to such great persons who have rendered greatest service to the country and there is no harm to offer them our thanks, but there are limits to gratefulness. But at all cost, hero-worship must be avoided. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that this caution was very necessary for India, because we are already having some traditions established in this regard.

(3) Make a political democracy a social democracy: The third thing, Dr. Ambedkar suggested that we must not content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy.

AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF TRUE DEMOCRACY

Dr. Ambedkar was the pioneer of democracy in India. He convinced that is not merely a form of government, but quite essentially a form of society. Thus he wanted a society based on

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democratic values. Democracy, as envisaged by Dr. Ambedkar, was revolutionary in the context of hierarchical society that India was, and still is. He thought of it as a weapon to attack casteism, in which caste dominance was often congruent with economic dominance, and the resulting oppression, both socially and economically. His concept of democracy was an attack on feudal society with the most striking manifestation of social inequality called caste. Political participation in the form of elections thus became his utmost priority because by this, he believed, the traditional feudal structure will be crumbled under other astrictive identities. In fact, the political assertions of the lower castes which are historically disadvantaged extended the favourites of Indian democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that free India should be made safe for democracy. Due to the peculiar social formation in India there are Minority communities pitted against a Hindu Communal Majority, that if no provisions are made in the Constitution to cut the fangs of the Hindu Communal Majority, India will not be safe for democracy. The untouchables, therefore, insist on devising a Constitution which will take note of the special circumstances of India and contain safeguards which will prevent this Hindu Communal Majority in society from getting possession of political power to suppress and oppress the untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar's vision was to bring a social transformation by breaking down the system of Varnas and Castes so that everybody gets the opportunity of self development. For this he adopted a democratic and Constitutional means. His thinking was predominately occupied by Constitutional and democratic ideologies. His philosophy was based on humanism of a democratic and pragmatic type. Throughout of his life he was fully pre-occupied with human problems, and also raised a movement against the cruelty of humanity, indignity and untouchability and injustice against man and women. For him, everything must be judged by the standards of utility and justice, that is, by fruits or by its consequences, in the interest of the many. He opposed Gandhi and other Congress leaders those who had given utmost importance only on the political freedom of the country. He was not against the political freedom but along with political freedom, he, laid stresses on social 306 freedoms, democracy and dignity of the depressed classes those who are crippled for centuries by the Hindu society.

THE FUTURE OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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Where does this leave us, as far the future of Indian democracy is concerned? On the face of it, there is little reason for optimism. Dr. Ambedkar's vision of democracy and socialism has failed to materialize. Political democracy has survived, but economic democracy remains a distant goal, and therefore, democracy remains incomplete and lopsided. In fact, even political democracy is not in very good health. Further, Indian democracy is confronting new challenges, including the Hindustan movement, growing economic inequality, the rise of militarism, and the brazen misuse of power by political parties (including those purporting to represent the underprivileged).

Having said this, there are also counter-trends, in the form of a growth of democratic space and democratic spirit. A startling variety of social movements have flourished in India, and creative initiatives keep expanding the boundaries of political democracy year after year. Many new tools of democratic practice have emerged, unforeseen by Dr. Ambedkar: the right to information, the panchayati raj amendments, modern communication technology, transnational cooperation, to name a few. The quality of Indian democracy is also gradually enhanced by a better representation of women in politics, wider opportunities for people's involvement in local governance, and the spread of education among disadvantaged sections of the society. The most powerful and promising trend is the growing participation of the underprivileged in democratic processes. This, I believe, is the wave of the future.

As discussed earlier, Dr. Ambedkar had a visionary conception of democracy, which needs to be "rediscovered" today. But going beyond that, we must also enlarge this vision in the light of recent developments. While Dr. Ambedkar was far ahead of his time in stressing the link between political and economic democracy, perhaps he failed to anticipate the full possibilities of political democracy itself. He thought that in the absence of economic democracy, ordinary people would be powerless. Also, he thought of political democracy mainly in terms of electoral and parliamentary processes. In both respects, his assessment was highly relevant at that time. Today, however, we are constantly discovering new forms of democratic practice, in which people are often able to participate even if economic democracy is nowhere near being realized.

This ability to participate arises from the fact that economic privilege is not the only basis of advantage in democratic politics. Money power certainly helps, but this advantage is not always decisive. Much depends also on organizational activism, the weight of numbers, the strength of

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arguments, the force of public opinion, the use of communication skills, and other sources of bargaining power. Aside from bargaining power, social ethics can also come into play in a democracy where there is room for what Dr. Ambedkar called "morality".

CONCLUSION

To summarize, B.R. Ambedkar was a demonstrative figure of Indian Politics in the Gandhian period. Ambedkar has emerged as a chief political philosopher with the rise of the dalit movement in modern times. There are several attempts to understand Ambedkar and his philosophy. B.R.Ambedkar, the chief draftsman of Indian Constitution, emerged at the moment in British rule. In whole life Ambedkar worked outside the mainstream of national politics. He worked for the Depressed Classes' uplift within the political and constitutional framework of the imperialist period. He realized that being socially treated as an untouchable; he could not get a status of equality and dignity within the Congress politics which was dominated by Caste Hindu politicians.

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. In conclusion, it can be said that this research gives closer and analytical insight into the thoughts of Ambedkar and provides an answer to the question of whether we, the Indians, achieve religious tolerance, human equality and freedom, true democracy, gender respect in the society, justice and peace in the light of political philosophy of Ambedkar whose memory will ever guide the nation on the path of justice, liberty and equality.

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