

# DR. AMBEDKAR: THE IDEAS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY ON INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Kusum**

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science,  
Singhania University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan

## *Abstract*

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the great Indian constitution maker, his idea regarding Indian democracy and to capture the position on issues whose relevance is even felt at present. Analyzing the idea of democracy of B.R. Ambedkar in details, it can be found out that B.R. Ambedkar had unshakeable faith in democracy. Democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to him him democracy means liberty, equality, and fraternity. 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. Ambedkar considers the disadvantaged should be the constitutive basis of the state. He demands special considerations for certain groups based on disadvantage, disability, subordination, oppression, and injustice.*

## **Keywords:**

*Dr. Bhimrao  
Ambedkar, Social,  
Democracy,  
equality.*

## **Introduction**

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), 'a symbol of revolt' as mentioned by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India was one of the front-ranking nation-builders of modern India. He is popularly known as the pioneer who initiated the liberation movement of roughly sixty-five million untouchables of India. Yet, Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution, notwithstanding all handicaps of birth, has made, by pursuit

of knowledge in the humanities, social sciences, politics and law, an indelible imprint on the body politic of the country. A glance of his copious writing would evidently show that despite his preoccupations with the problems of the dalits (Untouchables), B.R. Ambedkar has in his own way, made significant contributions to the contemporary political ideas. B.R. Ambedkar stood apart from his well-known famous contemporaries of India in three respects. First, being a great scholar, social revolutionary and statesman, he had in himself a combination of these attributes that one rarely possesses which made him distinguished from other intellectual personalities of that time. As an intellectual, gigantic personality and creative writer, he had imbibed knowledge that was truly encyclopedic. The range of topics, width of vision, depth and sophistication of analysis, rationality of outlook and essential humanity of the arguments that he came-up with made him different from his illustrious contemporaries. Secondly, B.R. Ambedkar never wrote merely for literary purpose. In his scholarly pursuit as in his political activities, he was driven by a desire to comprehend the vital issues of his time and to find solutions to the problems of Indian society. With this motivation, he intervened, at times decisively in shaping the social, economic and political development of the nation during its formative stage. There was hardly any issue that arose between the early 1920s and the mid-1950s in India to which B.R. Ambedkar did not apply his razor-sharp analysis, whether it was the question of minorities, reorganization of states, partition, constitution or the political and economic framework for an independent India.

### **Connotation of Democracy**

Democracy is the most valued and also the indistinct political terms in the modern world. The ancient Greek word 'democracy' means rule by the demos, which can be translated as either 'the people; or 'the mole' depending on one's ideological preference. By itself, democracy means little more than that, in some undefined sense, political power is ultimately in the hands of the whole adult population and that no smaller group has the right to rule. Democracy can only

take on a more useful meaning when qualified by one of the other word with which it is associated, for example, liberal democracy, representative democracy, participatory democracy or direct democracy. All free societies are democratic; democracies can fail to protect individual freedom. Countries are generally considered democratic to the extent that they have fair and frequent elections in which nearly all adults have the right to vote, citizens have the right to vote, citizens have the right to form and join organizations and to express themselves in alternative sources of information existed. Architects of democracy must determine the constitutional structure that best suits the needs of a particular country, alternative forms of constitutional democracy include parliamentary versus presidential forms of government, plurality versus proportional representation system and federal versus unitary systems.

### **Concept of Social Democracy**

Social democracy as a practical concept offers an account of the complex interplay among ideas of legitimacy, efficiency and stability. It aims to enhance the functionality and stability of democratic states. It seeks to explain the functional deficiencies of libertarian democracy. It allows active participation of people in institutions of democracy and makes institutions accountable to people. It attempts to actualize rights. Social democracy insists that democracy and associated rights must be extended to social and economic spheres as well. Social security, justice and participation play important roles in improving the quality of democracy in a given society. Social democracy is about practically realizing the value of democracy at societal level. This belief became prominent in the west with the failure of liberalism and socialism in realizing their ideals in society. The idea of democracy gained ascendancy in the aftermath of the Second World War and took various forms, such as political democracy, economic democracy and social democracy. Social democracy co-exists with values like equality, community living and justice. The contours of social democracy vary on the basis of how one conceives and relates these values and ideals. In India, Ambedkar came with ideas aimed to abolish the highly discriminatory and

inhuman caste system. One can decipher some variant of social democracy as an ideal from his writings and practice. The key values of his variant of social democracy are equality, society as an ethically constituted community and state socialism. Ambedkar, as an important political philosopher, has creatively enriched the tradition of social democracy.

### **B.R. Ambedkar's idea of Democracy in Indian context**

According to B.R. 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. B.R. Ambedkar paid greater attention to social linkage among people than separation of powers and constitutional safeguards for democracy. And political power. He was conscious of the social and economic inequalities which corrode the national consciousness of the Indian people. B.R. Ambedkar said, "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". B.R. Ambedkar paid serious attention to religious notions that promote democracy. B.R. 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. He writes, "It is common experience that certain names become associated with certain notions and sentiments, which determine a person's attitude toward men and things.

### **Ambedkar's Conception of Social Democracy**

Ambedkar not only conceptualized democracy suited to Indian conditions but also fought for realization of the ideals of democracy. He addressed the question

of social dynamics arising out of the functioning of a democratic government in an undemocratic society. He articulated the concerns of people who were deprived of basic civil rights. Social equality, freedom, associated living, just social order and moral governance are recurring themes in his writings and his struggles for liberation of the oppressed. Ambedkar defines democracy distinctly, addressing historical, political, social, and social specificities of India and puts it in a philosophical way. He views democracy as a desired moral principle of governance and suggests mechanisms to enrich it for the common good. In other words, Ambedkar aspires to nurture the culture of democracy in all spheres of life. For him it is not just an ideal but also a social necessity to build a good society. Democracy is based on the doctrine of one man one value. The fundamental principle of modern democratic states is the recognition of the value of the individual. It is based on the belief that each individual has but one life, and full opportunity should be accorded to each to attain his maximum development in that life. Neither of these propositions can be said to be part of the accepted philosophy of aristocracy of India. According to Ambedkar, a democracy is quite different from a republic as well as from a parliamentary government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of government, parliament or otherwise. Before adopting parliamentary democracy in India, Ambedkar had critically evaluated the functioning of parliamentary democracy in the West. He identified that wrong ideologies and wrong organisations were responsible for the failure of democracy in the western countries that had adopted democracy as a form of government. The rulers were always drawn from the ruling class and the class that was ruled never becomes the ruling class. So democracy did not fulfill the hopes it held out to the common man of ensuring to him liberty, property and pursuit of happiness.

Ambedkar explains that parliamentary democracy rests on four premises: a) The individual is an end in himself. b) The individual has certain inalienable rights, which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution. c) The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent

to the receipt of privilege. d) The state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.

He criticizes the dominant tendency that views politics and ethics as two different and unrelated realms. He suggests that politics cannot be conceived separately from ethics. He emphasizes democracy as a moral social order rather than mere political governance. His view of democracy connects both social and political aspects as a part of common moral sphere. Ambedkar argues that democracy requires a moral order in society. In this direction, he further enriched his earlier definition. According to him, 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 our fellow men. Democracy is spoken of as free government. Free government means that in vast aspects of social life people are left free to carry on their life without interference of law, or if law has to be made, then the law-maker expects that society be founded on morality to make the law a success. Ambedkar observed that only Laski categorically proposes moral order as the basis of democracy. Ambedkar further adds that democracy requires 'public conscience'. 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.

### **Equality as a Prime Value of Democracy**

Ambedkar's conception of social democracy is based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. The idea of equality is a fundamental value of democratic life. In Ambedkar's view liberty and fraternity are derived from equality. He holds that where equality is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied. In other words, equality pre-supposes democracy. According to Ambedkar: Democracy is another name of 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

endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and farce. Political thinkers recognized that formal equality of citizenship is not enough for a meaningful life. Democracy requires an equality of democratic agency. Democracy is ideal for human beings because it is the only form of society which at once depends upon and provides for the organisation of free communication. It demands equality, because it is only as equals that men can communicate. Equality as a moral ideal is necessary for realization of democracy in any sphere of life especially in a society where inequalities are internalized. In political theory, the idea of equality is addressed in a limited sense, being mostly confined to political equality and silent about economic equality. Ambedkar extends the idea of equality to social and economic realms. He argues for equality in a caste-ridden society based on graded inequality. He calls for equality of untouchable communities in terms of dignity and self-respect. His notions of the individual, the community and the religion are strikingly different from those of others, in that he imbues them with reason, justice and ultimately morality. Ambedkar maintains that society has to discover aptitudes and capacities of individuals and train them progressively for social use. He emphasizes that there are indefinite pluralities of capacities in an individual which may characterize his persona. A society to be democratic should pave the way to use all these capacities of the individual. Social conditions necessary for flourishing of democracy are: Social equality, Economic security and Access to knowledge. Ambedkar believes that the more equal the social rights of citizens are, the more able they are in utilizing their freedom.

### **Moral order**

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Democracy requires the existence of a moral order in the society. He contemplates that politics cannot be devoid of ethics. The Government may pass the laws and implement them but unless there is morality in the society law cannot achieve any success. “A politician”, he said, “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 the drain”. Therefore he has no faith in value-free politics. Once he reportedly said that, “politics has become a game of scoundrel but for me it is a mission”. He however puts before the people an ideal as to how politics could be mission.

### **Public conscience**

The last but not the least is the condition of public conscience which is essential for the successful working of the democratic Constitution. According to him 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.” He cites an important example of Reverend Scott a white man, who tried his best to liberate the Blacks from White racial supremacy and racial discrimination in South Africa. Though he was a white man, he served the cause of the blacks, irrespective of the feelings of his white community people. He thinks that it is an example to be emulated by others specially the Indian high castes. He states very categorically that is South Africa everywhere in India. However, he feels strange as to why there could not be any non-scheduled caste who could take up the cause of the oppressed people in India. He rightly observes that it was because of lack of “public conscience”

### **State Socialism as a Feature of Welfare State**

Democracy could give effect only to the doctrine of one man, one value so far as the political structure is concerned. It has left the economic structure intact and allowed market forces to mould it. It was equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society, if democracy was to live up to its principle of one man, one value. Ambedkar made an attempt to define by the law or constitutional framework both the economic structure as well as the political structure of society. Ambedkar pointed out that in the West,



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 their bargaining power. Ambedkar considered state socialism, which treats everybody equally, ensures fundamental rights and safeguards the weak and vulnerable groups, as another important dimension of social democracy. State socialism is a regulative principle of the nation's economy. The state has to plan the economic life of people on lines that would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also provide for equitable distribution of wealth. The plan proposes state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation and a modified form of socialism in the field of industry; it places squarely on the shoulders of the state, the obligation to supply the capital necessary for agriculture as well as for industry. Ambedkar considers state socialism essential for economy and for India's rapid industrialization. Private enterprise cannot do it, and if it did it would produce those inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe and which should be a warning to Indians. Ambedkar maintains that state socialism has to be established by the law of the constitution and thus makes it unalterable by any act of legislature or executive. Ambedkar attempts to establish state socialism without abrogating parliamentary democracy and without leaving its establishment to the will of a parliamentary democracy.

### **Dr. Ambedkar's views for building Democratic India**

Dr. Ambedkar propagated the Social Democracy in India to remove the disabilities of Depressed and Suppressed Classes of India, in order to create a new social order based on humanity. Dr. Ambedkar's concept of Social Democracy is based on the principle of humanism. The Hindu Chaturvarnya system is based on in human principles. Dr. Ambedkar strongly opposed Chaturvarnya system in order to establish society based on humanism. For him Democracy is a way to establish human conditions for Depressed and Suppressed Classes. He was against hero-worshipped and dictatorship, he

explained it as follows: “No country can remain democratic and no people can preserve a Constitutional government, if the generality of the people are imbued with an immoderate of hero-worship... For, in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul.

### **Conclusion**

Ambedkar is an important political philosopher, who contributed to the tradition of social democracy. Ambedkar’s conception of democracy represents a liberalism of a different kind, encompassing elements of socialism. Equality, in both theory and practice is an essential component of his conception of democracy. He wanted to broaden the scope of equality from political domain to include social and economic domains as well. His conception of democracy has both instrumental and intrinsic values. Dr. Ambedkar advocated equality, liberty and fraternity for the success of Democracy. Social Democracy recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of the life. His idea of Democracy is based on Social Democracy. His idea of Social Democracy is with the reference of Indian social situation. 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.

## References

- 1) Ambedkar, B.R. (1936), Annihilation of Caste; reprinted in Government of Maharashtra (1979-98), volume I.
- 2) Ambedkar, B.R. (1948), "States and Minorities", memorandum submitted to the Constituent Assembly; reprinted in Government of Maharashtra (1979-98), volume I.
- 3) Drèze, J.P., and Sen, A.K. (2002), India: Development and Participation (New Delhi: Oxford University Press). Government of Maharashtra (1979-98),
- 4) Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, 16 volumes (Mumbai: Department of Education).
- 5) Gombert, Tobias, ed. Foundations of Social Democracy (Social Democracy Reader 1). Berlin: Friedrich Eberto Stiftung, 2009.
- 6) Gosta Esping-Andersen and Kees van Kersbergen. "Contemporary Research on Social Democracy", Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 18 (1992), pp. 187-208.
- 7) Mayer, Thomas and Lewis Hinchman. The Theory of Social Democracy. Malden: Polity Press, 1997.
- 8) B.R. Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches, vol-9, p-168.
- 9) B.R. Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches, vol-1, p-41.
- 10) Lokhande. G. S., B.R. Ambedkar: A study in social democracy p-23

## Contributors Details:

Kusum



Research Scholar, Department of Political Science,  
Singhania University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan