

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VISION ON DEMOCRACY: AN OVERVIEW

Sandeep Kaur

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Mata Gujri College, Fathegarh Sahib

ABSTRACT

This research paper is an attempt to analyze the views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Democracy. Democracy, from layman's perspective is nothing but freedom, liberty. Therefore, to understand the true meaning and importance of the concept of Democracy through the lenses of legal luminaries like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar says: "Democracy is not a form of government but a form of social organisation." He firmly believed that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy. For him, political democracy is not an end itself, but the most powerful means to achieve the social and economic ideals in society. He was against violence. He was firm believer of the Buddhist doctrine of non-violence. He asked his followers to 'agitate' for their rights in a peaceful manner. He said that violence undermines the spirit 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, 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.

Keywords: Democracy, Constitution, Freedom, Equality.

There are various form of government known to history – Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy. Dictatorship may be also added in this category. But, at the present time most popular form of government is Democracy. In the West, the Greeks claim to have invented the Democracy. If we look at the Ancient Indian history it would be clear that India had a long tradition of Democracy. According to the Ambedkar's views the concept of Democracy, Panchsheel and Majority has their roots in Buddhist thought. During the time of Buddha Democratic practice was prevailed. Dr. Ambedkar considered that the democracy is the most accepted form of government in the world. In this paper, we will discuss Ambedkar's concept of Democracy. Dr. Ambedkar was popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar. Everyone knows that he was one of the architects of Indian Constitution. He was a very well known political leader, eminent jurist, Buddhist activist, philosopher, historian, writer, economist scholar and editor too. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who played a vital role in framing the Constitution of India, believed in democracy. His contribution in the framing of democratic Constitution of India is enormous and long lasting. Dr. Ambedkar says: "Democracy is not a form of government but a form of social organisation." He firmly believed that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy. For him, political democracy is not an end itself, but the most powerful means to achieve the social and economic ideals in society. He was against violence. He was firm believer of the Buddhist doctrine of non-violence. He asked his followers to 'agitate' for their rights in a peaceful manner. He said that violence undermines the spirit of democracy.

Ambedkar was convinced that democracy was the only form of government which ensured liberty and equality in the society. Addressing the first session of the round table conference in 1930, he said, "The bureaucratic form of government in India should be replaced by a government which will be the government of the people by the people and for the people." Believing that without self-government a country cannot make any progress, Ambedkar said, "We must have a government 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."

According to Dr. Ambedkar democracy is the most popular form of government in the world. He said that when one examines the questions one finds that there are two views regarding the Democracy. One view is that democracy is a form of government where the government is chosen by the people- where government is a representative government. According to this view democracy is just synonymous with representative government which means adult suffrage and periodical elections. According to another view a democracy is

more than a form of government – a form of organisation of society. There are two essential conditions which characterises a democratically constituted society - (a) absence of stratification of society into classes (b) a social habit on the part of the individuals and group which is ready for continuous readjustment or recognition of interests.”¹ Dr. Ambedkar analyzed the concept of democracy keeping in mind the prevailing social situation in India. The study of Indian society shaped his conception of the democratic system. The definitions of democracy given by Walter Bagehot or Abraham Lincoln were also not satisfactory to Ambedkar. But Ambedkar defined democracy in a different way. According to Dr. Ambedkar, “Democracy is a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought without bloodshed.”² “The principle of self government expresses the desire of the people to rule itself rather than be ruled by others whether the rules are absolute monarchs, dictators or privileged classes. It is called Democracy.”³ He further said that “Democracy is a state of policy where, the governing class failed to capture powers to govern others and where the majority takes the reign of the instrumentalities of the state.”⁴ He believed that democracy means no slavery, no caste, and no coercion. Freedom of thoughts, choice and capacity to live and let the others live would be the right path to democracy. Democracy is not a gift of nature. It is a habit of social living and can be acquired by the people themselves for their emancipation and well- being. His idea of democracy is a type of social system, with necessary tendencies and limit, may be said to be enshrined in the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

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, 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.” The main concern of his life was to make democracy safe for the common man and for the good of his country. He regarded that the democratic principle of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness were essentials in human life. He also had given importance on human rights.”⁵ He was keen that every member of society must share in exercising them. He was of the opinion that there should not be any kind of discrimination in the exercise of human rights, because it would be a negation of social and political democracy. He attached more importance to the freedom to form associations in various fields of life. For that he sought help of a Constitutional government. According to him, such institutions were the very soul of freedom and democracy⁶.

Dr. Ambedkar realised that the democracy in India was a product of the historical situations 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 the roots of democracy in India. According to Ambedkar, the existence of anything as undemocratic as caste was, enough to kill the concept of democratic way of life. The division of India’s population into castes and creeds, he thought, made the country unfit for representative government. The fact is that Hindus in India divided into touchable Hindus and Untouchable Hindus surely made the concept of ‘government by the people’ meaningless. In such, a government, every role cannot be assumed by all. He said, such a government:

Tends to develop the personality of the few at the cost of the many a result
Scrupulously to be avoided in the interest of democracy. To be specific, it is
Not enough to be electors only. It is necessary to be law-makers, otherwise
Who can be law-makers will be masters of those who can only be electors.”

¹ Moon, Vasant (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writing and Speeches*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol. 9, 1991, p. 447-48.

² Narake, Hari (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writing and Speeches*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol. 17, 1991, p. 475.

³ Moon, Vasant (ed.), *op.cit*, Vol. 10, 1991, p. 39.

⁴ Moon, Vasant (ed.), *op.cit*, p. 448.

⁵ Ambedkar, B.R., *State and Minorities*, Thacker and Company, Bombay, 1945, p. 3.

⁶ Ambedkar, B.R., Ranade, *Gandhi and Jinnah*, Bheem Patrika Publications, Jalandhar, 1943, p. 36.

TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

Dr. Ambedkar divided Democracy in three categories i.e. (1) Political Democracy (2) Economic Democracy (3) Social Democracy. Ambedkar said that, economic and social democracy is the tissues of a political democracy. The details are as following:

POLITICAL DEMOCRACY:

Dr. Ambedkar located the political power in the people thinking of that it is the key to all social progress. According to him, the soul of democracy is the doctrine of, "One man, one vote" and "one vote, one value". What he means each and every man to count for one. No man for more than one. It means every government should be on the anvil both in its daily affairs and also at the end of a certain period when the voter and electorate would be given an opportunity to assess the work done by the government. We have established political democracy just because we do not want to install by any means whatsoever a perpetual dictatorship of anybody of people.⁷ In Ambedkar's view, democracy is unrealizable without freedom of political discussion. He regarded democracy as both a social way of life and political method. Dr. Ambedkar gave four premises upon which political democracy rests:

1. The individual is an end in itself.
2. The individual has certain inalienable rights which must be granted to him by the Constitution.
3. The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his Constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege.
4. The state shall not delegate power to private person to govern others.⁸

According to Dr. Ambedkar, in democracy every party has the right to criticize and capture political power. Parties have the right to keep the power in its hands. He considered the real test of the party system would come when the governmental power might shift from the ruling party to some other political party or parties.

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

Economic Democracy means that the economic needs of the people are to be satisfied. No person should die in want of food, clothing and housing, if democracy is to live up to its principle of one man, one value. He points out that the principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field. He was aware of the fact that capitalism makes democracy meaningless as it cannot protect the individual freedom and rights from the invasion of other rights. Therefore, He was in favour of establishment of State Socialism to retain Parliamentary Democracy. He was wanted that the law of the Constitution prevailed to save both democracy and socialism. In one of his books 'State and Minorities', Ambedkar proposed for the adaption of an economic political system as a new venture to benefit the poor masses of our society.

At the time of framing the Constitution of India, as the chairman of Drafting Committee, he introduced the Directive Principles of State Policy with the object to establish economic democracy in India. The Directive Principles of State, as laid down in the Constitution, directs the state to secure an adequate means of livelihood. Dr. Ambedkar opined that the Directive Principles have a great value and it laid down the ideals of economic democracy and it shall be the duty of the government to implements it. It is the best way of reaching economic democracy, the fullest opportunity to act in the way in which they want to act.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Dr. Ambedkar explored that social democracy means a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as principle of life. In Ambedkar's view, they are not separate, they are union of trinity. He regarded Democracy more than a form of government. It is a form of the organisation of the society. Ambedkar considered democracy involved rational empiricism, emphasis on individual, the instrumental nature of the state, nobility of means, discussion and consent, absence of perpetual rule and basic equality in all human relations.

⁷ Constituent Assembly Debate, Vol. VII, p. 535.

⁸ Moon, Vasant (ed.), *op.cit*, p. 409.

He outlined the equality is the principle of democracy which must be sought through social revolution. Dr. Ambedkar suggested that the social design of democracy, in one aspect possibility the equality, should be extended to other aspects of life, too. He expressed that the politician wanted good government and their aim was to establish a democratic form of government. But they never stopped to consider whether a democratic form of government was possible. He said that politician never realised that there was not a form of government; it was a form of society. Dr. Ambedkar stressed the need of making political democracy a social and economic democracy. He also wanted to end the social barriers. For him, political democracy could not last long unless these barriers at the base of it. Social democracy recognized liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. In the absence of liberty and equality few would their supremacy over the many.

AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF TRUE DEMOCRACY:

Dr. Ambedkar was the pioneer of the democracy in India. He wanted to establish a true democracy in India. He wanted a society on the bases of democratic values. Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that free India should be made safe for democracy. His 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. Therefore, he adopted a democratic and Constitutional means. His philosophy was based on humanism of a democratic and pragmatic type. He also faced several human problems in his life, so he raised movement against the cruelty of humanity, indignity and untouchability and injustice against man and women. 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 this, he laid stress on social freedom, democracy and dignity of the depressed classes. He wished India to establish a society wherein all citizens could enjoy the fruits of freedom and live with self-respect and dignity as a man. However, he was a great advocate of the spirit of social brotherhood. He emphasizes that democracy is a tool in the hand of ordinary people to further their interests and safeguard human values and dignity. Therefore, he stressed to establish democracy in India.

REFERENCES

1. Ambedkar, B.R., The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principle in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, Vol.3, p. 99-106.
2. Ambedkar, Baba Sahib, Writings and Speechs, p. 16, Vol.1, 1979.
3. Agrwal, Sudarshan, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Man and His Message: A Commemorative Volume, Prentice Hall of India, 1991.
4. Ambedkar, Mahesh, The Architect of Modern India: Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Diamond Pocket Books Pvt. Ltd., 2016.
5. Ambedkar, B.R., The Buddha and His Dharma: A Critical Edition, Oxford University Press, 2011.
6. Ambedkar, B.R, Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah, Bheem Patrika Publications, Jalandhar, 1943, p.36
7. Constituent Assembly, Debate, Vol. VII, p. 535
8. Grover, Varinder, Political Thinkers of Modern India: B. R. Ambedkar, 1992.
9. Massey, James, Dr. Ambedkar's vision of a just society: In Mohd. Shabbir (ed.), Ambedkar on Law, Constitution and social Justice, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 153-155.
10. Moon, Vasant(ed.), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979, Vol.1, p.251.
11. Rao, G. R. S., Managing a Vision: Democracy, Development Governance, Gyan Publishing House, 2005.