

Relevance of Ambedkar's Vision on Social Democracy in India

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Abstract : The purpose of the present paper is to analyse the relevance of social democracy as envisaged by Ambedkar in the present Indian context. Social democracy, as a philosophy, occupies a pivotal role in determining the social life of millions of oppressed and downtrodden communities all over the world. Social democracy occupies centre stage in the philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the constitution of Independent India and the messiah of millions of downtrodden, reverently called Baba Sahib. The dominant and oppressive social structures like caste and the resultant social exclusion are what he considered as the main stumbling blocks on the way to social democracy in India. For democracy to survive in a country like India, it must be rooted in social democracy. Economic liberalisation regimes in the present India can no longer ignore the stark realities of unequal and discriminatory patterns of its social life and chronic poverty. It is in this context, that the social democratic vision of Dr. Ambedkar becomes central to his post independent political discourse and praxis in the country.

IndexTerms - Democracy, Ambedkar, Neo-liberalism, Constitution, India

Introduction

Ambedkar, popularly also recognized as Babasaheb was a great patriot, social –political thinker, educationist, economist and administrator, political reformer, parliamentarian, constitutionalist of high order and a revivalist for Buddhism in India. He was also the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He was a true renaissance man, a person who excelled in many different areas of inquiry. Ambedkar was champion of social justice. His thought is centrally concerned with issues of freedom, human equality, democracy and socio-political emancipation. He was a revolutionary social reformer who demonstrated great faith in democracy and the moral basis of a society. Ambedkar made lot of contributions in the spheres of understanding individual, caste, Hindu Social order, champion of human rights, problems of Hindu women, Indian minorities, nation and nation building. Ambedkar drafted the provisions in the constitution of India that are guaranteed every citizens the social, economic, political and culture rights. Ambedkar's view was that, the government is answerable to all of society's problems, to socioeconomic political cultural civic. The present paper is based on secondary data.

Ambedkar on Social Democracy

The most prevalent form of Government at the present time is 'Democracy'. In the West, the Greeks claim to have invented the Democracy. The term 'democracy' has derived from the Greek term 'demos' and 'kratos', means people and government. Aristotle, father of Political Science, defined democracy is a form of government in which supreme power is in the hands of freemen. This classical definition of democracy found echoes in John Stuart Mill and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson preferred that form of democracy which provided a "government by its citizen in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority. To Walter Bagehot, democracy as "Government by discussion". Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As a liberal thinker, Ambedkar was a hardcore believer in the value of constitutional democracy having irrevocable elements of social and economic democracies, in addition to political democracy. In fact, Ambedkar understood it very well that the Western pattern of democracy is not applicable to Indian scenario. He strived hard for the establishment of democracy in post-independence India. He expressed his anguish over the last of the entire past heritage.

Ambedkar viewed democracy as an instrument of bringing in relation to the change peacefully. Democracy does not merely mean rule by the majority or government by the representatives of the people. To him, the Hindu Social System divided the society into Varnas and Castes and also denied the existence of liberty, equality and fraternity which are the deepest concern of democracy. If in democracy liberty does not destroy equality and equality does not destroy liberty, it is because at the base of both there is fraternity. Fraternity is, therefore, the root of democracy. Democracy was lost in Brahminic India. Ambedkar interpreted the concept of democracy in Indian context. In his opinion, democracy is not as a fixed dogma, it always changes its form, it is not always the same in the same country and that it always undergoes changes in purpose. Ambedkar realized that a mere distinction between state and society, state and government and the state and nation are not enough to serve the purpose. The views of J.S.Mill, Harold.J. Laski and MacIver on democracy were not appropriate in Indian social system because it failed to focus on the social relationship between the people who form a society. Indian society, to Ambedkar, is based on Castes and everything is organized on the basis of caste. The Indian society does not consist of individuals; it consists of collection of castes with utter lack of bond of sympathy or co-operation. The existence of the Caste is a standing denial to the ideals of democracy.¹⁰ He viewed "Democracy in this country is like a summer sapling. Without social unity, the roots of sapling cannot be strengthened. If social unity is not achieved this summer sapling of democracy, will be rooted out with gust of summer wind". He said that there are certain

fundamental considerations which go to the roots of democracy and which cannot be ignored without putting democracy in peril. Ambedkar considered democracy as a historical movement.

A government for the people is only possible when the attitude of each individual is democratic that means each individual is prepared to treat every other individual as his equal and is supposed to give him same liberty which he claims for himself. This democratic attitude of mind is the result of socialisation of the individual in a democratic society. Democratic society is therefore a prerequisite of a democratic government. By "Democracy" Ambedkar meant, "a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed". He further said that "Democracy was 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". For Ambedkar, "Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience and to be searched in the social relationship. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen". He believed democracy means no slavery, no caste, and no coercion. 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. 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 principles of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness were essentials in human life. 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. For him, the purpose of modern democracy was to being about the welfare of the people. the perpetual rule of one class or a political party, the monopoly of the means of production in a few hands, the curtailment of civil liberties, the blind faith in democratic leaders, the atmosphere of fear and oppression, the misuse of political authority, the negative use of political recourses, etc., are some of the vices that can invariably damage the basic structure of democracy. The fundamental elements of his concept of democracy were liberty, equality, fraternity, natural rights and justice. He believes that these are essential for complete development of personality and capacities of every person. He believed that democracy offers every individual to achieve social equality, economic justice and political justice guaranteed in the Preamble of the Constitution. Therefore, in the Constituent Assembly he had stated that mere securing political democracy is not sufficient. It should be followed by establishing social democracy and economic equality. His vision was the foundation of social democracy in India. According to Ambedkar, "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". 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.

Classification of Democracy

Ambedkar focused on three categories of democracy in India that are (1) Political Democracy (2) Social Democracy and (3) Economic Democracy. For him, Social and Economic democracy are the tissues and fiber of a political democracy.

Political Democracy

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. Democracy is unrealizable without freedom of political discussion. A right to vote gives a man no real part in controlling government unless he is free to form his own opinions about his vote, to hear what others have to say about the issues; and to persuade others to adopt his opinions. He further said that "Parliamentary system of government is much more than government by discussion. It is negation to hereditary rule. Whosoever wants to rule must be elected by the people from time to time. He must obtain approval of the people. There are two pillars on which the Parliamentary system of government rests and works. Those are (1) an opposition and (11) free and fair elections. In this system of government people should know the other side if there are two sides to a question. Hence a functional opposition is required. Opposition is the key to a free political life. No democracy can do without it". While visualizing high political objects, he said that democracy must in harmony with social aims. He regarded democracy as both a social way of life and political method. Ambedkar pointed out that there are four premises upon which political democracy rests:

- (1) The individual is an end in himself.
- (2) The individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed 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 and.
- (4) The state shall not delegate power to private persons to govern others.

In democracy every party has the right to criticize and capture political power. The party in power tries to keep the power in its hands. According to him, 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. Understandably, Ambedkar realised that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy because these are the tissues and fiber of a political democracy.

Social Democracy

Ambedkar viewed that social democracy means as a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as principle of life. They are not separate, they are union of trinity. Democracy, to him is more than a form of government. It is a form of the organisation of society. There are two essential conditions, which characterise a democratically constituted society. First is the absence of stratification of society into four classes. The second is a social habit on the part of individuals and groups, which is ready for continuous readjustment of recognition of reciprocity of interests. He regarded a favorable social setting as a pre-requisite

for the success of democracy: without this democracy would not last long. The formal framework of democracy was of no value in itself and would not be appropriate if there was no social democracy. Ambedkar regarded democracy as a way of life. It involved rational empiricism, emphasis on individual, the instrumental nature of the state, voluntarism, and the law behind the law, nobility of means, discussion and consent, absence of perpetual rule and basic equality in all human relations. He outlined that equality is the principle and the substance of democracy which must be sought through social revolution. If our society is to become democratic, the spirit of democracy should be slowly and peacefully introduced into our customs and institutions. In searching out the social design of democracy, he suggested the possibility that equality in one aspect, should be extended to other aspects of life, too. Democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness, resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged. He regarded democracy as both a social and a political method.

To end the social barriers, the inequality of caste system, Ambedkar stressed the need of making political democracy a social and economic democracy. For him, political democracy could not last unless these lay at the base of it. Social democracy recognized liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. They formed an inseparable trinity in a democratic social structure. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality, without liberty, would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of social relationship. If the fact is recognized that there was complete absence of two things in Indian society: equality in social and economic life, then political democracy, the political authority, must strive for removing this contradiction at the earliest moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy.

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 viewed that the democratic order must minimize the glaring inequalities in society. In democratic society there must be neither an oppressed class nor an oppressor class. It is the duty of the state to prevent the monopoly of the means of production in few hands. To empower both the Dalits and non-Dalits economically, he proposed that the state should be given political power for the regulation and control of both key industries and agriculture; to this end he proposed that economic powers should be incorporated into the body of the Constitution itself without abrogating Parliamentary democracy and without leaving its establishment to the will of democracy.

He was aware of the fact that capitalism makes democracy meaningless as it cannot protect the individual freedom and rights from the invasion of others rights. He, therefore, advocated for establishment of State Socialism to retain Parliamentary democracy and avoided dictatorship to safeguard individual liberty and to make it sure that the law of the Constitution prevailed to save both democracy and socialism. In his book, 'States and Minorities', he proposed for the adaptation of an economic political system as a new venture to benefit the poor masses of our society. Ambedkar suggested the following proposals:

- (a) Insurance shall be a monopoly of the state.
- (b) Agriculture shall be a state industry.
- (c) Land will belong to the state and shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed.
- (d) There will be no landlord, no tenant and landless labourer.
- (e) Rapid industrialisation of economy under the complete supervision and control of the state should be initiated

To protect the citizen against economic exploitation he proposed to include certain provisions on fundamental rights. He introduced the Directive Principles of State Policy with the object to establish economic democracy in India.

Challenges to Democracy in India

According to Ambedkar, Democracy is understood to be a political instrument and where this political instrument exists, there is democracy. There are several factors that pose challenges to the democracy.

- The existence of the Caste system is a standing denial to the existence of ideal society and to the democracy. Thus, there is no room for the down-trodden and the outcasts in politics, industry, commerce, and in education.
- The Caste system accompanied by the principle of 'Graded Inequality' also put a great threat to democracy. It results into a separation of society, into a privileged and a subject class.
- The fixation of occupation in caste system also cuts the very roots of democracy.

Conditions for successful working of democracy

(1) 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.

(2) The existence of an opposition;- The opposition is a condition precedent for democracy

(3) Equality in law and administration;

(4) Observance of constitutional morality;- violation of Constitutional morality would damage the Constitution and the democracy as well.

(5) No tyranny of the majority;- 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.

(6) Moral order of society: -Ethics is something separate from politics. If there is no moral order, democracy will go to pieces and

(7) Public conscience Public conscience means conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong or injustice.

Things necessary for maintenance of democracy

- Constitutional methods
- Not to lay liberties at the feet of a great man
- Make a political democracy a social democracy

Ambedkar on State Socialism

Ambedkar studied several features of Marxism and favoured some Marxist principles. He usually subscribed to the material view of history and agreed to the need for a total change for bringing in relation to the equality. He also accepted the thought of public ownership of property. Though, he did not become a Marxist. The other significant diversity of socialism was Democratic Socialism. Ambedkar's firm belief in democracy attracted him to this ideology. He felt that socialism necessarily function within a democratic framework. Democracy and socialism need not be opposed to each other. Therefore, in 1947, Ambedkar propounded the thought of 'State socialism'. Even earlier, when he recognized the Self-governing Labour Party in 1937, he had adopted a broadly socialist programme. The name of the party itself designates that it was to be a party of all depressed classes. Its programme incorporated state management of significant industries and bringing in relation to the a presently economic system. The party wanted to ensure minimum average of livelihood for agricultural and industrial workers.

State socialism means that the state would implement a socialist programme by controlling the industrial and agricultural sectors. To him, the state will actively manage both the industry and the agriculture. This will ensure equitable sharing of wealth and protect the needy and the poor. Rapid industrial progress and welfare of all the parts of the civilization will be the responsibility of the state. Though, the democratic organizations such as the parliament will also remain intact. In 1947, Ambedkar suggested that the Constitution of India should incorporate the principle of State Socialism. This thought of State Socialism shows that Ambedkar was aware of the troubles of poverty and economic inequality. So, he attached much importance to the role of the government. Government, just as to him, has to perform the role of a welfare agency. It has to ensure rapid progress and presently sharing of the fruits of that progress.

Relevance of Ambedkar's Social Democracy

The present neo-liberal market-economy model runs in the opposite direction of the well conceived social democracy model of Dr. Ambedkar. The profit driven paradigm of free market economy accords no importance whatsoever to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The only value that it considered worth of honouring is the value of unrestrained and free flow of capital without least interference by the institution of the state. This new paradigm of neo-liberal market economy did not confront at all with the pre-modern institution of caste in India. On the contrary, caste and market nurture close relationship within the paradigm of neo-liberal market-economy. They reinforce each other. Market thrives on capital and profit. Since capital has traditionally been accumulated by the upper castes who have been able to establish their monopoly over the economy of the country, the free market economy, based as it is on the unrestrained flow of capital, tends to promote the interests of the upper castes rather more confidently. It welcomes them with enormous opportunities and hefty profits. But at the same time, it ignores the ex-untouchables who lack the requisite capital.

Since Dalits constitute the bulk of the poor and unemployed, they have suffered the most. Dalits happened to be the beneficiaries of state's affirmative action before India entered into the realm of neo-liberal free market-economy. The Indian state had brought some improvements in the lives of Dalits by making special provisions to provide them in education, employment, respectable wages, access to land, water, health, housing and other resources. But the welfarist stance of the Indian state gave way to a new system of free market-economy in 1990s. One of the main tasks of this new paradigm is to force the roll back process of the welfare state and to allow the market forces to operate in an unrestrained manner. The pro-market stance of globalisation has led to the widening of the gap between the privileged few and the large mass of the marginalized sections of the society. It further led to marginalisation of the already marginalized people, thus widening the gulf of inequity in the society. Moreover, atrocities against Dalits have also increased many folds during the economic reforms measures. To quote Dr Ambedkar 'that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few and the many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey'. Globalisation has further sharpened the already existing contradictions between political equality on the one hand and social and economic inequality on the other. His vision of social democracy assumes added importance in the wake of neoliberal reforms in India, particularly since 1991. The neo-liberal market-economy with singular focus on economic growth and profit, suffocates the delicate nurturing milieu of social democracy in India.

Conclusion

Babasaheb Ambedkar is one of the foremost thinkers of modern India. Ambedkar was a great social revolutionary. The social thought of Ambedkar basically revolves around the idea of understanding the dynamics of caste system in India and waging a tireless crusade against the curse of untouchability. He emphasizes that democracy is a tool in the hand of ordinary people to further their interests and safeguard human values and dignity. His vision was not to establish a mere political democracy but social democracy, what he calls a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principle of life. He endeavoured to rouse self consciousness and self respect among the Depressed Classes. Resting on Ambedkar's thoughts, the Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all, based on social justice and human dignity. Since free market-economy is premised on the withdrawal of state from the economic-welfare domain, it leads, consequently, to the demise of the institution of social democracy based as it was on the social welfare pillars of the state. Can economic liberalisation alone help generate new avenues for rapid economic growth and equal opportunities for all in a society like India marked by rampant social hierarchies and inequalities? This is an urgent and critical issue that needs serious attention. And it is in this context that social democratic vision of Dr Ambedkar assumes critical importance. Failure to engage with this vision is likely to result in further perpetuation of inequalities leading to social unrest and political violence, with the downtrodden and the marginalized becoming the worst victims.

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