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Dr. Ambedkar's Thoughts On Democracy And Its Relevance In Existing Indian Scenario

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Abstract:

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14 April, 1891 in Mahar caste in MHOW town now is known in his name Dr. Ambedkar Nagar in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh in a family of Mahar caste which was one of the 'untouchable' castes. The problem of Untouchability created many difficulties in Ambedkar's higher education. With the help of a scholarship from Sayajirao Gaekwad, Maharaja of Baroda, he attended Columbia University, USA, and later on with hard work managed to study at the London School of Economics.

INTRODUCTION :

In England he attained a doctorate and also became a barrister. On returning to India he virtually dedicated himself to the task of upliftment of the untouchable community. Soon he won the confidence of the- untouchables and became their supreme leader. To mobilize his followers he established organisations such as the Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha, Independent Labour Party and later All India Scheduled Caste Federation. He led a number of temple-entry Satyagrahas, and organized the untouchables, established many educational institutions and propagated his views from newspaper like the 'Mooknayak', 'Bahishkrit Bharat' and 'Janata'. He participated in the Round Table Conference in order to protect the interests of the untouchables. He became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and played a very important role in framing The Indian Constitution. He was also the Law Minister of India up to 1951. Right from 1935 Ambedkar was thinking of renouncing Hinduism. Finally, in 1956 he adopted Buddhism and appealed to his followers to do the same. He felt that the removal of untouchability and the spiritual empowerment of the untouchables would not be possible by remaining a Hindu. Hence, he embraced Buddhism. Ambedkar was not only a political leader and social reformer but also a scholar and thinker. He has written extensively on various social and political matters. 'Annihilation of Castes', 'Who Were the Shudras', 'The Untouchables', 'Buddha and His Dharma' are his more important writings. Besides these, he had also published many other books and booklets propagating his views. His thinking was based on a deep faith in the goals of equity and liberty. Liberalism and the philosophy of John Dewey also influenced his thinking. Jotirao Phule and Buddha have exercised a deep influence on Ambedkar's ideas on society, religion and morality. His political views were also influenced by his legal approach. Ambedkar's personal suffering, his scholarship and his constant attention to the problem of bringing about equality for the downtrodden untouchable community forms the basis of his thinking and writings.

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the greatest leaders of modern India. He was an eminent scholar and a brilliant intellectual. He was a great humanist and a revolutionary. Although he is merely known as the greatest saviour of the suppressed community but his greatness goes far beyond this fact. He was not only concerned with grievances the untouchables, the most vulnerable community of the world, but he touched every aspect of human life viz. social, political, cultural, anthropological, religious, historical, gender etc. Of course, there is no other person in India who can have an analogy with Dr. Ambedkar in terms of knowledge with humanistic thoughts. Really, he was an ocean of knowledge on different faculties. In spite of this fact, it is unfortunate that very few people in India have come to know about Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy and the endeavor he did for the elevation of humanity. If he is described in one word, it would be humanist and if in two words then he, definitely must be known as social humanist. As he was on the greatest social humanist of the world, it is therefore natural that he should have adopted such a political that

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could be conducive to the people who have been with no fundamental rights and lived a life worse than the beasts. In a completely undemocratic society i.e. the Hindu society, he could not serve his purpose of elevating the lower castes of India. And of course, in order to make his dream true - to bring the untouchables and other lower castes at par with other sections of society, he adopted the democratic political system. The genesis of Democracy in the world Democracy is a form of government in which a substantial proportion of citizenry directly or indirectly participates in ruling the state. It is thus distinct form of government controlled by a particular social class or group or by a single person. In a direct democracy citizens vote on laws in an assembly, as they did ancient Greek city states and do today in New England towns. In an indirect democracy citizens elect officials to represent them in Government; representation is typical in most modern democracies. Today the essential features of democracy as understood in the western world, are the citizens be sufficiently free in speech and assembly, for example to form competing political parties in regularly held elections. The first democratic form of Government developed in the Greek city states during the sixth century B.C. Aristotle's constitution of Athens shows that in Athens all citizens rich and poor, participated fully in governments; miners, women, slaves and foreigners however- perhaps ninety percent of the population were not citizens. Greek democratic Institutions were collapsed under the imperial onslaught first of Macedonia and later Rome. Republican Rome had popular assemblies (comitia), in which the citizens met to elect officials and make laws. The comitia lost their power, however, first to the aristocratic senate and ultimately to the Roman Emperors. Democratic ideas did not reappear on a significant scale until the 17th century. The Barbarian invasions and the fall of Rome in the 5th century A.D. produced a European society that was primarily concerned with security rather than democratic institutions. This gave rise to the rigidly hierarchical system feudalism and monialism. Political attitude were moreover shaped by the powerful Christian church, which taught, in effect, that existing institutions had divine sanction. Nonetheless, the middle ages saw the establishment of rudimentary representative bodies for the development of democratic institutions. The medieval kings claimed divine authority to rule, but they relied on their principal baronial vassals for practical advice, rendered in council. Gradually the councils claimed more than advisory powers, and their membership was expanded to include elected representatives from the knightly and burgher classes. This was the genesis of the modern

legislature.

In the England civil war of 17th century, Parliament briefly won full supremacy over the crown, but it vigorously rejected the constitution proposed by radical and unsuccessful group known as the Levelers, which called for universal male suffrage, fair representation and the abolition of noble privilege.

Democracy in Ancient India

It appears that the earliest organization within Indian monasteries was democratic in nature. This democratic nature arose from two historical factors. First, the Buddha did not, as was the custom among the teachers of his time, designate a human successor; instead Buddha taught that each monk should strive to follow the path that he had preached. This decision of Buddha placed every monk on the same footing. There could be no absolute authority vested in one person, for the authority was Dhamma of the Buddha. Secondly, the region in which Buddhism arose was noted for a system of tribal democracy. When serious question demanded attention in the region, the male inhabitants would meet to decide upon a course of action, often electing a temporary ruler. This republican tradition, which supported the anti authoritarian nature of Buddha's teaching, was adopted by the early sanghas. When the issue arose, all the monks of the monastery assembled. The issue was put before the body of the monks and discussed. If any solution was forthcoming it had to be read three times, with silence signifying acceptance. If there was debate, a vote might be taken or the issue referred to committee or the arbitration of the elders of a neighbouring monastery. As the Sangha developed a certain diversion of labour and hierarchical administration was adopted.

Dr. Ambedkar's Views on Democracy

Dr. Ambedkar was the champion of human rights and democratic form of government. The idea of democracy he put forth had much broader perspective than the generally perceived idea of political liberty, equality and fraternity. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the social and economic dimensions of democracy and forcefully argued that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy. Recalling the definition of democracy given by his predecessors or contemporaries he could not be satisfied with these conceptions of democracy. In particular he recalls Walter Bagehot when he defines democracy as a 'Government by discussion' as well as propounded by Abraham Lincoln as 'a Government of the people, by the people and for the people.' Deviating from these oft-repeated notions, however,

Ambedkar defines democracy as “a form and method of government, whereby, revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed”. Dr. Ambedkar further added in effort of explaining democracy that democracy could not be equated either with Republic or Parliamentary Government. The roots of democracy lay not in the form of Government, parliamentary or otherwise. According to him, “Democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society.”

Meaning: Social and Economic Democracy

Ambedkar viewed democracy as an instrument of bringing about change peacefully. Democracy does not merely mean rule by the majority or government by the representatives of the people. This is a formalistic and limited notion of democracy. We would understand the meaning of democracy in a better fashion if we view it as a way of realizing drastic changes in the social and economic spheres of society. Ambedkar's idea of democracy is much more than just a scheme of government. He emphasizes the need for bringing about an all-round democracy. A scheme of government does not exist in vacuum; it operates within the society. Its usefulness depends upon its relationship with the other spheres of society. Elections, parties and parliaments are, after all, formal institutions of democracy. They cannot be effective in an undemocratic atmosphere. Political democracy means the principle of 'one man one vote' which indicates political equality. But if oppression and injustice exist, the spirit of political democracy would be missing. Democratic government, therefore, should be an extension of a democratic society. In the Indian society, for instance, so long as caste barriers and caste-based inequalities exist, real democracy cannot operate. In this sense, democracy means a spirit of fraternity and equality and not merely a political arrangement. Success of democracy in India can be ensured only by establishing a truly democratic society. Along with the social foundations of democracy, Ambedkar takes into consideration the economic aspects also. It is true that he was greatly influenced by liberal thought. Still, he appreciated the limitations of liberalism. Parliamentary democracy, in which he had great faith, was also critically examined by him. He argued that parliamentary democracy was based on liberalism. It ignored economic inequalities and never concentrated upon the problems of the downtrodden. Besides, the general tendency of the western type of parliamentary democracies has been to ignore the issues of social and economic equality. In other words, parliamentary democracy emphasized only liberty whereas true democracy implies both liberty and equality. This analysis becomes very important in the Indian context. Indian society was demanding freedom from the British. But Ambedkar was afraid that freedom of the nation would not ensure real freedom for all the people. Social and economic inequalities have dehumanized the Indian society. Establishing democracy in such a society would be nothing short of a revolution. This would be a revolution in the social structure and attitudes of the people. In the place of hereditary inequality, the principles of brotherhood and equality must be established. Therefore, Ambedkar supported the idea of all-round democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar emphasizes that an open society is prerequisite as an essential condition for democratic form of government. He says, “A democratic form of government presupposes a democratic form of society. The formal framework of democracy is of no value and would indeed be a misfit if there was no social democracy.” for him Democracy was a form of society. And what form should society adopt so as to make the democracy well working and functioning. He opines, “It may not be necessary for a democratic society to be marked by unity, by community of purpose, by loyalty to public ends and by mutuality of sympathy. But it does unmistakably two things. The first is an attitude of mind, an attitude respect and equality towards their fellows. The second is a social organization free from rigid social barriers.”⁵ Democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness, resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged. The soul of democracy is the doctrine of one man, one value. Unfortunately, Democracy has attempted to give effect of this doctrine only so far as the political structure is concerned by adopting the rule of one man, one vote which is supposed to translate into fact the doctrine of one man, one value. It has left the economic structure to take the shape given to it by those who are in a position to mould it.

There should be a Constitutional law which would make Government responsible to the people and to prevent the tyranny of the people by the Government. Consequently, almost all Laws of Constitution which relate to countries which are called Democratic stop with Adult Suffrage and Fundamental Right. They have never advanced to the conception that the Constitutional Law of Democracy must go beyond Adult Suffrage and Fundamental Right. He was of the view that it was equally essential that the constitution should also prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society, if Democracy is to live up to its principle of one man, one value.

As per Ambedkar views the present situation in India can not be said democratic neither in terms of political, economic nor social. There are great disparities both between the classes, castes and individuals. India's economic arena is much more discriminated than expected. The economic structure adopted has been responsible to have widened the gap between the haves and have-nots. Therefore Democracy in India can not be accepted functioning with merits.

Dr. Ambedkar warned the countries like India not to merely make copies of the copies of the constitutions of other countries and proclaimed to make the most of experience of their predecessors. Dr. Ambedkar stated that the principle of one man one value on which democracy rests can be protected and preserved by securing liberty of individuals from invasion by other individuals which is the object of enacting fundamental Rights. The connection between individual liberty and shape and form of the economic structure of society may not be apart to every one. None the less the connection between the two is real. Political Democracy, according to him, rests on the four premises which may be set out in the following terms:

1. The individual is an end itself.
2. That the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the constitution.
3. That the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege.
4. That the state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.

Essential Conditions For Democracy-

Dr. Ambedkar discussing about the essential conditions precedent for the successful working of democracy he argued that –Essential conditions precedent for successful working of democracy As we know that the government who in power goes after every five years to the people to ask whether those who have been in power are well qualified to be entrusted with power and authority to look after their interests, to mould their destiny and to defend them. But Dr. Ambedkar is not satisfied with this long duration to check the loyalty of government to the people and nation rather he is of the view that there should be a veto to raise the question policies and working pattern of the government. He says, "Democracy requires that not only the Government should be subject to the veto- long term of five years - at the hands of people, but there must be an immediate veto in the parliament ; immediately ready there and then to challenge the Government." Further making his view more clear he advocates that if the Government is not concerning with the cause of people and nation the opposition should challenge the authority of Government. Dr. Ambedkar stood firmly for a strong opposition and considered it as a precedent for democracy. But if we retrospect the Indian scenario, there has never been an opposition since the independence. Today there is an opposition but it is not as effective as it must be. It is because both the Government and opposition are travelling on the same track i.e. both are performing in the same manner. There has no left morality to raise the finger at other because all the political parties taking full bath in pond of corruption, bribery, nepotism, casteism and immorality. Therefore, the opposition in spite of adequate number in the house has been ineffective to harm the Government. The one political parties leave no stone unturned when at the wrong activities of the Government and raise the related issues both outside and inside the house but when these parties capture the power repeat the same with full of their potential. Another condition that he told precedent for the success of democracy is the equality before in law and administration. Moving our eyes Indian social and political arena, we find that in spite of a strong constitutional guarantee before law and in administration, caste, political party, religion and ideology playing their role everywhere. The political parties and leaders are interfering in the matters of administration, molding the destiny of administration in favor of their caste or party fellows. The political parties and leaders have been using the administrative power for their own causes and making the money from every opportunity they get. Caste, religion and creed are still being observed in administration. I personally observed many offices and found portraits, Paintings, statues and hymns/ shlokas from a particular religion. Besides, the festivals and other parallel activities of a particular religion are often being observed to have celebrated in the government offices and educational institutions. This cannot be the sign of impartial administration. In a democratic state there should be a free and fair administration. The ministers and legislators do not hesitate even to say that they will take care the matters of those who have given vote to them. It has become a common phenomenon that when one party government goes and other party grab power, it change all the previously existing staff that does not suit to their interests and appoint all new office bearers who can strive for completing their order without making comments or hurdles or right or wrong. One of the most important condition precedents for the successful democracy, According to him, is the observance of constitutional morality. The democracy pleads for the removal of hereditary ruler or monarch. But what is happening in our country all are acquainted with it. The

hereditary system of ruling is being observed in all the political parties. The leaders of many political parties have been sticking to the seats and not only this but they are taking their sons, wives and other relatives in politics and presenting them as their predecessors and the people are accepting them. The leaders do not want to quit from the politics even they are not able to walk and talk. In our country, an huge army of sadhus, Swamies, Yogies, Bapus, Mahatmas and Yogies are preaching about renunciation, devotion, human service, abstention and morality but not a small impact of this is seen nowhere. As the preachers increase, the volume of corruption, immorality, black marketing also increase. Even the so called Sadhus and Mahatmas do not spare of such charges. If these religious men are not free from greed and lust how can they establish morality in the society and politics. Our leaders are showing no concern to the causes of people but running after money and power for them and their family. Ours is said is a religious country but if we compare our leaders to the leaders of other countries, we find a great difference. Dr. Ambedkar, citing the example of George Washington, the president of America proved that how constitutional morality works. Washington was like God to the American people and became the first of America after the constitution was drafted. Washington refused to be elected again and said to his people, "My dear people, you have forgotten the purpose for which we have made our constitution. We made this because we did not want a hereditary monarchy and we did not want a hereditary ruler or dictator. ...If you stick to worship me year after year and term after term what happen to your principles? Can you say that you have rightly rebelled against the authority of the English King when you are substituting me in this place?" Washington due to the loyalty and fidelity stood second time and when the people third time approached him he spurned them away. He said that the principle not to have hereditary rule. You should not fall to prey. But if we observe the Indian scenario, what we find is that our leaders do not want to quit even unto their death. The Goons, criminals are observed enjoying the power with the leaders and ministers and some of our leaders and ministers are themselves come from criminal background with many cognizable offences. This can be justified with the data available about the members of Parliament elected in the 2004 and 2009 parliamentary elections.

Information about Criminal Cases against Members of Parliament elected in 2004 and 2009 Parliamentary Election

Year	Total Members of Parliament	Criminal Cases against the members(Numbers of MPs)	Serious Criminal Cases against the members(Numbers of Mps)
2004	543	128	58
2009	543	162	76

It is evident from the table that the members of parliament are governing us with criminal records and in such a situation one can assume explicitly that what kind of social or constitutional morality can prevail in the nation in social and political and other domains. The trend of criminal MPs is increasing continuously; the number of parliamentary member with criminal cases was 128 in 2004, in 2009 parliament it increased to 162 and same trend could be observed in case of serious kind of cases against the MPs. It was 58 in 2004 and in 2009 it rose to 76. The situation of the legislative assemblies in not much different from the parliament or it may even be worse than that. The electronic and print media discussed the issues that the huge amount of money used to getting the Rajya sabha seats by the candidates; it shows that money becomes the prime player in the politics and it is degrading our democracy.

All the parties are likely swimming in the same pond of corruption, nepotism, and hereditary system of ruling. Constitutional morality is totally lacking here. One other thing according to him which the democracy requires for the smooth functioning is the moral order. But social morality is less observed in the people of our country. No leader whether local or national do not feel any compunction for committing or to have committed the most heinous crimes like rape, dacoity, murder, loot and even making the vast scams to loot the natural and other resources of the country as the nation recently witnessed in 2G spectrum and coalfield scams. Another condition required for the successful working of democracy is that there must be no glaring inequalities in society. But we see in present scenario of Indian society that there are wide inequalities are prevailing and going to be wider as the time passes. This is the most dangerous aspect of our democracy that when elections come the political parties promise in their manifesto that if they come in power they would make available rice, wheat and other essential things on cheaper rates. This is dangerous because these are the basic needs of people and that should have been fulfilled much earlier but these kinds of needs are still unfulfilled. The political parties have been using the poverty of people as a weapon to win the election. More than this in the political parties are found to have purchased the vote of people in exchange of small money and it is because the people are poor and the political parties are having ample of money to purchase the votes. Black money is also playing a vital role in this regard. In almost all the elections the parties or the individuals contesting the election use wine and

other materials to get the vote of people and such kind of things are considered socially condemnable and which could kill the consciousness of people to distinguish what is wrong and what is right. All this is because there are glaring inequalities in our society. The political leaders have been engaging in widening the gaps between the haves and have notes. Whether state or national level the leaders are busy of making properties and consequently their wealth has increased many times after entering the politics or having relationship with political leaders. In 2004, 304 members of parliament contested second time in 2009 parliamentary election and their property 289 percent from 2004 to 2009. In 2004, their average property was 1.9 crores and in 2009 it reached to 4.8 crores. Those 157 members of parliament who won second time in 2009 their average property reached 6.0 crores from 2.2 crores in 2004 hence the total growth in their property was 288 percent. If the privileged few will not willingly and voluntarily surrender their privileges, then the distance between them and the lower orders will destroy the democracy. Unfortunately, this has been the innate nature of our traditionally ruling class people that they never interested to surrender their rights in favor of nation or lower castes/classes as was witnessed in Japan and other countries. The ruling class people in these countries came forward with their own with and surrendered their wealth and privileges and said that all these things belong to the nation and Samrat (the King), therefore we give our all properties and surrender our privileges for the sake of our nation. But in India this kind of attitude of ruling class has never been witnessed at any time. Contrary to this, the ruling classes in India from time to time make attempt to justify the unjustifiable social structure in the name of their religious scripture and are not willing to surrender their privileges in the name of caste and social hierarchy. More than this, whenever the state attempted to redistribute the resources e.g. agriculture land, the dominant castes/ classes found out loopholes and escaped successfully from such kind of moves initiated by the state. Dr. Ambedkar puts it in the following words, "As to the privileged class it to be wrong to upon for anything more than their agreeing to the benevolent despot. They have their own class interests and they can not be expected to sacrifice them for the general interests or universal values. On the other hand their constant endeavor is to identify their class interests with general interests and to assume that privileges are just payments with which society rewards specially useful and meritorious functions." It is equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of society, if democracy is to live up to its principle of one man, one value. For making this possible the state as well as society has to give way condition in which all whether poor or wealthy; upper or higher on hierarchical scale must considered equal before law and in societal and religious matters but in practical we find it impossible even after more than sixty years of the enactment of the constitution. For the successful functioning of democracy, according to him, an ideal society is required which should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. Dr. Ambedkar among the enumerated essential conditions required for the successful working of political democracy, more importantly emphasized on economic and social democracy without which political democracy would be in jeopardy. Unfortunately, even after the six decade of independence, the Indian society as well as political democracy has been unable to generate the ideal conditions essential for the smooth functioning of democracy as per Dr. Ambedkar's perspective.

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