



DR. AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Dr. Gunisha Saluja*

The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of the Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society.”(Ambedkar)

Introduction

Roy (cited in Mishra) stated that Dr. B.R Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a great scholar, knowledgeable, public intellectual, a visionary and a social revolutionary who dazzled like the brightest stars on the Indian sky from 1918 to 1956. Despite his humble family background of the untouchable Mahar community in Maharashtra, he as a brilliant scholar, a professor, a jurist, a legislator, a constitutionalist, a social reformer, a statesman, a cabinet minister and above all, a revolutionary dalit leader has remarkably outpaced many of the great countrymen of his generation. He is considered as an architect of the Indian Constitution because of his unforgettable contribution in its framing which ultimately laid down the foundation of resurgent modern India. No doubt, there were renowned jurists, scholars, statesman, social activist and political leaders in the Constituent Assembly, yet it had the privilege to have Dr. Ambedkar as Chairman of the Drafting Committee. His distinct ideas about the concept of Social Justice, Constitutionalism, Social Democracy, Rights of the people and his concern about the welfare and the development of the poor people especially Dalits are reflected in each and every part of the Constitution (79) .

Roy (cited in Mishra) asserted that Dr. B.R Ambedkar was a staunch supporter of Democracy but his idea of democracy is not restricted only to the political democracy but is very comprehensive one. He considered that the concept of Democracy is not new for the Indians rather since from the ancient times, many governing bodies recognized the principles of democracy. According to his views, social and economic democracy is very important for the success of political democracy. The tripartite democracy i.e. social, economic and political is imperative for achieving liberty, equality and fraternity as given in the Preamble of the Constitution of India. Dr. Ambedkar while highlighting the significance of democracy said that, “It seems to me that there lies on us a very important duty to see that democracy does not vanish from the earth as the governing principle of human relationship. If we believe in it, we must both be true and loyal to it. We must not only be staunch in our faith in democracy, but we must resolve to see that whatever we do not help the enemies of democracy to uproot the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity” (79).

Need of the Study: Indian Democracy is not only limited to a government by the representative of the people rather it comprises of social, economic as well as political democracy. To achieve democracy in actual terms, it is very important that the caste barriers created in our society must be removed. Social democracy is very important for the existence of political democracy. Therefore, it is very important that on the basis of constitutional values, electoral democracy must be transformed into constitutional democracy. The present study focused on the vision of Dr. B.R Ambedkar on concept of Democracy. It is very important to put realistic approach of Dr. B.R Ambedkar up to the masses. It is also very important that we must adopt the same ways and means to carry forward Ambedkarism to the

* Assistant Professor & Principal (Officiating), Khalsa College of Law, Amritsar.

next generation. In 21st century, it is very important to analyse whether we have secured the same notion of democracy to our people as envisaged by him.

Research Methodology: The researcher has followed the method of doctrinal research. The study includes the analyses of books, Articles in newspapers, magazines etc.

Meaning of Democracy

The term democracy is very popular one. It has its origins in the Greek language. It combines two shorter words: ‘demos’ meaning whole citizen living within a particular city-state and ‘kratos’ meaning power or rule. Thus, its original meaning is power or rule of the people. It is a form of the government in which the people rule directly or indirectly through their elected representatives. In democracy, the ultimate sovereignty resides in the people. Some definition of democracy is as follows (Wagh):

According to Lord Bryce, Democracy is, “A Government in which the will of the majority of qualified citizens rules”.

According to J.R. Lewis, “Democracy is basically as a form of Government, but a form which exists to supply and maintain a better society, and to provide the maximum amount of liberty for the individual consistent with the attainment of order and security within the State.”

Abraham Lincoln defines ‘Democracy’ as government- of the people, by the people and for the people.

Thus, the term Democracy has stood for many ideas and principles and has many aspects since its ancient origin. Democracy in fact, is not merely a form of Government rather it is a complex of social, economic and political factors which affect the relationship of the State to the individual (Wagh).

Dr. Ambedkar’s Perspective on Democracy in India

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had a complex outlook for the future of democracy in the country. His thoughts on democracy are of indestructible nature and no philanthropic nation may neglect them. Keeping this in mind the framers of Indian Constitution including Dr. Ambedkar himself, have taken care that the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are well represented and recognized in our Constitution. Ambedkar had a unique contribution to the development of democracy in India. His aim was to give space to the most marginalized, politically, economically and socially, the Dalits in the democratic system because of his radical approach. Ambedkar was not only a victim of the most heinous inhuman practice i.e. untouchability but he also had the unique experience of a theoretician and an activist with a background of consistent struggle against it (Behera).

Roy (cited in Mishra) stated that Dr. Ambedkar was a keen believer in democracy who took a rationalistic and comprehensive view of democracy. He defined democracy as “*a form of the government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed.*” He imagined such democratic society in which there will be neither the oppressed class nor a suppressed class and there is equality among all. His approach towards the problem of democracy was very secular and he strongly believed that the only way to get rid of the caste system from the society is to abide by the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He believed in complete and real democracy. His desire to build democracy in India within social, political and economic sphere was very strong. He was fully aware of the fact that the success of political democracy is possible only with social and economic democracy. He considered social and economic democracy as tissue and fibre of political democracy (80).

According to a study by Roy (cited in Mishra) Dr. Ambedkar does not prefer democracy in India as he said, “*I am no believer in democracy as an ideal to be pursued in all the circumstances and in all the climes; and having regard to the present day conditions in India, democracy is a most unthinkable system of the government. At any rate, for some time India needs the strong hands of an enlightened autocrat.*” (55-56). Dr. Ambedkar was most disturbed about one aspect of the formal democracy especially in India where the majority rule means the majority of numbers not of the opinions which will definitely favour the interests of savarna Hindus who would always oppress the unfortunate untouchables. (Rajasekhariah and Jayaraj 357-375). In his address to the Constituent Assembly, he said “*On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment*

or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.” (Rajasekhariah and Jayaraj 357-375). Dr Ambedkar provides two methods to have State socialism without dictatorship and the first is to retain Parliamentary democracy and the second is to prescribe State socialism by the law of the Constitution so that it cannot be suspended, amended or abrogated by the Parliamentary majority. Then only the triple object of establishing Socialism, retaining Parliamentary Democracy and avoiding Dictatorship can be achieved (Rajasekhariah and Jayaraj 357-375).

Dr. Ambedkar had explicitly stated the conditions for the successful working of the democracy which are as follow (Saha):

- i. **Equality:** The first and foremost necessary element for the success of democracy is equality. Dr. Ambedkar stated that *“there must be no glaring inequalities in the society. There should not be an Oppressed Class and a Suppressed Class. There must not be a class which has got all the privileges and a class which has got all the burdens to carry. Such a thing, such a division, such an organization of a society has within itself the germs of a bloody revolution, and perhaps it would be impossible for the democracy to cure them”* (Saha). Therefore, the success of democracy is only possible where equality prevails without any discrimination as it is provided under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution.
- ii. **Strong opposition:** The second important condition for the successful working of democracy is the existence of strong opposition to the ruling majority. In Kingship there was no Veto Power in hands of people but in Democracy there is Veto power in hands of people. Kshirsagar (cited in Wagh) stated that for Ambedkar, *“Democracy means a veto of power. Democracy requires that not only that the Government should be subject to the veto, long term veto of five years, at the hands of the people, but there must be an immediate veto. For this, there must be an Opposition in the Parliament to challenge the Government”* (61). Thus, if there is strong opposition, then the debate on the important affairs of the country can be possible which is very important to put responsibility on the government.
- iii. **Equality in Law and Administration:** There must be not only equality before Law, but there must be equality of treatment in administration. Discrimination in administration causes atrocities on untouchables and depressed classes in India. Therefore, according to Dr. Ambedkar equality in Law and Administration as one of the conditions for success of Democracy.
- iv. **Constitutional Morality:** Moon (cited in Nathi and Sudarshan) asserted that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that, *“A Constitution which contains legal provisions, is only skeleton. The flesh of the skeleton is to be found in what we call constitutional morality”* (225-226). According to Dr. Ambedkar, Constitution is important for success of democracy but more important was constitutional morality in polity and society.
- v. **No Tyranny of Majority:** Dr. Ambedkar is of view that there is always clash between majority and minority for superiority in the society which ultimately leads to despotic situations in democratic society. Moon (cited in Nathi and Sudarshan) asserted that Dr. Ambedkar said that for successful democracy, *“The minority must always feel 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.”* (225-226).
- vi. **Moral order:** Moon (cited in Nathi and Sudarshan) asserted that Dr. Ambedkar said, *“A politician does not merely trade in politics, but he also represents a particular faith covering both the method as well as the metaphysics of politics”* (225-226). Moon (as cited in Wagh) 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 drain”*. According to Dr. Ambedkar, if we want implementation of democracy in true sense, moral order in politics should be emphasized because liberation is only possible through politics. So he was in favour of attainment of political power by the depressed classes of the society.
- vii. **Public Conscience:** Kshirsagar (cited in Wagh) stated that Public Conscience in the words of Dr. Ambedkar 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”*(61). Dr. Ambedkar considered the public conscience as essential condition for successful working of democracy because ultimately it is the will of the people that helps in the development of healthy democratic environment.

Conclusion

The thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar are fully suited to the Indian conditions. We have adopted our Constitution in 1950 and through Preamble declared to constitute it as a sovereign, socialistic, secular, democratic and republic and to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The question arose here is that whether the high ideals incorporated into the Constitution are achieved in reality or not yet. Though it is very difficult to answer it, but

it can be said with certainty that there are certain evils tormenting the Indian polity. Even today the deprived and marginalized sections of the society are discriminated and deprived from all the benefits to which they are entitled. Dr. Ambedkar was totally in favour of the elimination of caste system and not only wanted to promote equality among the various sections of the society but also expected the same attitude from the administration also. No doubt, the Constitution has guaranteed us various rights, but sometimes these rights are not enjoyed by the people in the true sense. Thus, the idea of associated living as given by Dr. Ambedkar is still missing from the Indian society. He was in favour of strong opposition in democracy but in the Indian politics, the role of opposition on various debatable issues is negligible. The opposition raises its voice only on those matters which are seen as politically beneficial. It is very essential that there must be free flow of ideas for a healthy democracy and people raising voices against the majority should not be unnecessarily punished and prosecuted. Dr. Ambedkar firmly believed that social and economic democracy is very important for the success of political democracy. He opined that political democracy is the most powerful means to achieve the social and economic ideals in society (Yadav).

Thus, it is now the time of revival of Dr. Ambedkar's vision of democracy to bring a classless society with economic justice and opportunity to all, to end poverty, ignorance, inequality and violence in the society for rising of mankind to higher material and cultural level. The thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar are most significant and relevant to the Indian society. Therefore, it could be safely concluded that in the present scenario, no doubt our democracy is going through many challenges but still we as a nation can survive and our democracy can flourish if there is proper implementation of the constitutional principles and philosophy of Babsaheb Ambedkar.

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