

# Dr. Ambedkar's Concept of Inclusive Democracy

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## ABSTRACT

*The domain of any academic epistemology, directly or indirectly, across the spectrum strives to champion the inclusive democracy and welfare state. India also claims to be one of the world's largest democracy. This paper is an attempt to understand the paradoxes of present democracy as highlighted by Ambedkar long ago while framing the Indian constitution. This paper analyses Dr. Ambedkar's inclusive vision of democracy which is one of the most important contribution to Indian society.*

## 1. Introduction

It is a matter of great pride for all Indians that we are performing well when it comes to the electoral terms of democracy. However, it reminds us about the contradiction which Ambedkar had already warned us and said that "On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality, in social and economic life, we will have inequality. In politics, we will recognise the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, because 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 contradiction? 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."<sup>1</sup>

This paper is an attempt to explore the internal contradiction of democracy when it comes to access to land rights, education, gender equality and self-respect to the most disadvantaged section of Indian society. This paper would seek to understand the root cause of India as a flawed democracy. This paper shall explore or scrutinise the nature, relevance and the reach of the idea of social welfare and democracy with special reference to the Ambedkar's vision of democracy. The paper shall also critically examine the possibility and prospect of the notion of inclusive democracy in the present context. Further, it emphasises on how the concept of democracy can be enriched in its spirit and substance, which was originally championed by Ambedkar and enshrined in the Indian constitution.

## 2. Dr. Ambedkar as The Strong Pillar of Economic Democracy

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from the speech to the constituent assembly on November 25, 1949.

We all are aware of the fact that at present, India is facing a very tough time on the economic front. Mounting unemployment, rising number of poor people, growing social tensions, brutality on oppressed groups, the concentration of resources, lack of proper distribution of income, negligible access of marginalised sections to public facilities, labour unrest, gender-based discrimination, pitiable levels of living of urban slum dwellers, agriculture-industry mismatch, failure in the land reform sector, foreign exchange crisis, faster population growth and lack of moral values are some of the issues of concern in our economy. Dr Ambedkar was an economist, who tried his best to raise these issues after the First World War. His contributions firstly as a professional economist and later on as a sound social scientist, a forceful Parliamentarian, a real social reformer and a propagator of human love and Peace shows a true testimony to his affection and approach for the development of the nation. He had a scientific forecasting power. That is why his life and career was fully dedicated to key social-economic issues, which the nation is facing currently. Dr Ambedkar published a paper in the Journal of Indian economic society in 1918, stressed the need of balancing farm size and productivity of crops, emphasised the reflex effects of the agriculture sector for industrialisation of the economy and explored the growth path of employment generation. These thoughts are still relevant to our labour-surplus economy.

## 3. The proponent of State Socialism

The very concept of state socialism means that a state would implement a socialist programme by controlling the industrial and agricultural sectors. According to Ambedkar, these two sectors were very crucial for nations progress and growth. Two major aspects of Ambedkar's state socialism -1. The state will own key industries and basic industries like iron and steel industries. That means there will be no private ownership of such industries. This will help in rapid industrialisation, and at the same time, the benefits of industrialisation will be distributed among all the sections of the society by the state. According to him, This would ensure the benefits of industrialisation reach as many people as possible,

and a few business houses do not appropriate them. He was also of the opinion that insurance should also be under state control and private involvement should be discouraged because these should not be reduced to profit-making ventures. As far as agriculture is a concern, for this sector also Ambedkar visualised that it should be treated as a state industry and not as a private initiative. It means that the state would initiate collective farming. It would ensure the equitable distribution of the profit that is made so that not many would be left behind. So farmers should be allowed to enjoy part of agricultural product and the state should get some share in the form of levy. In this way, Ambedkar paved the way for state socialist ideology. Food grains that was procured by way of the levy will be used for distribution at fair prices.

In other words, the state will actively control both the industry and agriculture. In this way, the state will not be a passive player rather it will play a very important role which was not only for future growth but also for the equitable distribution of profit and output which was not taken care of British India. This new system would ensure the equitable distribution of wealth and protect the needy and the poor from further exploitation. The exploitation that they were experiencing for generations and centuries. Thus, the welfare of poor and needy was one of the most important benchmarks for Ambedkar when he was devising constitution. He believed that poor people could not be put on the mercy of industrialists and capitalists. For him, not only political but economic freedom is also of utmost importance in free India. He wanted to have a programme of state socialism inalterable. So that whichever party comes to power, they have to devise ways and means to adhere to these basic guidelines. He was more in favour of expanding industrialisation, rapid development and a much larger range of industrialisation. Ambedkar further said that "I should have expected some provision whereby it would have been possible for the state to make economic social and political justice a reality and I should have from the point of view expected the resolution to state in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social and economic justice in the country, that there would be the nationalisation of industry and nationalisation of land, I do not understand how it could be possible for any future government which believes in doing justice socially economically and politically unless its economy is a socialistic economy".<sup>2</sup>

The main idea of Ambedkar's taxation policies was as follows:

1. The tax must be levied on the taxable capacity and not on the income.
2. The tax must be progressive, i.e. the rich must be taxed more and the poor less
3. Exemption to taxpayers below a certain limit.
4. The land revenue item must not be rigid but elastic and subject to variations.<sup>3</sup>

It was unjust to assess the land revenue on income. The rate of assessment did not depend on the capacity to pay the tax. The taxable capacity was enhanced with the growth in the income. Under these circumstances, it was held that the present system of assessment was unjust. So it was not just to

receive equal taxes from all. Those below a certain income must be exempted. In the case of land revenue, the rich and the poor were equally taxed. He remarked that article 107 of the land revenue code must be abolished, and land revenue must be brought under the income tax provision.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding prohibition, Dr Ambedkar says that a prohibition is a sheer madness. Its progress must not only be arrested but it must be immediately abolished. It has produced more evils than those it was intended to stop the manufacture of liquor. Now women and children also drink because liquor is manufactured in every home in the presence of women and children. It has produced more crime and the worst sort of demoralisation in the lower classes. From the point of equity, there is no justification for prohibition. But the cost of prohibition is borne by the general public. Why should the general public be made to pay the cost of reforming a lack or too of habitual drinkers who could never be reformed? Why should the general public be made to pay the cost of prohibition when the other wants of the public such as education, housing, and health are crying for remedy? Why not use the money for development plans? Who has greater priorities the drunkard or the hungry? There are pertinent question to which there are no answers except arrogance and obstinacy. Whatever happens, the policy of prohibition must be reversed and this colossal waste of public money should be put a stop to and the resources utilised for advancing general welfare.<sup>5</sup>

Talking about agriculture, Ambedkar says 'I too agree that after abolishing landlordism, the state must be the owner of the land and not the proprietor or the peasant. The natural consequences of the abolition must be collective farming or cooperative farming. However, we are many individualists. The cooperative farming, though useful and improving in production is regarded by the peasant as aggression on our system. It is due to the individualist's tendencies of our farmers. Though we abolished landlordism, we would not be able to build our economy on a sound basis by such methods. The whole outlook our peasants must be changed, then and then only we would be able to reap the fruits of revolutionary attempt to throw off the yoke of landlords.<sup>6</sup> It can be laid down without the fear of challenge that industrialisation will foster the enlargement of holdings and that it will be the most effective barrier against the subdivision and fragmentation. While agreeing on this, it may be observed that industrialisation will not be a sufficient remedy for consolidation that it will require direct remedies. However, it is also true that industrialisation, though it may not bring about consolidation will facilitate consolidation.<sup>7</sup>

The election manifesto of the schedule caste federation 1952 promised 'to strive for redemption from oppression and exploitation of men by men, of the class by class, and nation by nation.' The scheduled castes federation further supported the undertaking of the industry when it was possible and essential. Today is the finances Ambedkar suggested

- 1) Reduction of expenditure on the army
- 2) Relay of the salt tax

<sup>4</sup> Ibid,270

<sup>5</sup> Election Manifesto, SCF-1951 from works and speeches vol. 17(i) p-398-399.

<sup>6</sup> Y.D Sontakke, 'Thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar', (Samyak Prakashan: New Delhi, 2004), 271)

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Ambedkar Works and speeches, vol.1, -p478.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ambedkar Works and Speeches Vol. 13 p,9.

<sup>3</sup> Y. D. Sontakke, 'Thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar', ( Samyak Prakashan:New Delhi,2004),272

- 3) Abolition of the prohibition and the saving of the excise revenue
- 4) Nationalisation of insurance
- 5) Compulsory insurance for state and private employees.<sup>8</sup>

Further Ambedkar says to establish state socialism without abrogating parliamentary democracy and without its establishment to the will of parliamentary democracy. Critiques of state socialism even its friends are bound to ask why make it a part of the constitutional law of the land? Why not leave it to the legislature to bring it into being by the ordinary process of law. The reason why it cannot leave to the ordinary law is not difficult to understand. One essential condition for the success of a planned economy is that it must not be liable to suspension or abandonment. It must be permanent. The question is how this permanence is secured. It cannot be secured under the form of government called parliamentary democracy under the system of parliamentary democracy, the policy of the legislature and the executive is the policy of the majority for the time being. Under the system of parliamentary democracy, the majority in one election may be in favour of state socialism in industry and agriculture. At the next election, the majority may be against it. The anti-state socialism majority will use its law making power to undoing the work of the pro-state socialism majority and the pro-state socialism majority will use its law making power to doing over again what has been undone by their opponents. For these reasons, political democracy seems to be unsuited for the purpose. A dictatorship can give the permanence with state socialism requires as an essential condition for its fructification. Those who want freedom are not prepared to give up parliamentary democracy as a form of government. However, much they may be anxious to have state socialism they will not be ready to exchange parliamentary democracy for dictatorship even though the gain by such an exchange is the achievement of state socialism. The problem, therefore, is to have state socialism without dictatorship, to have state socialism with parliamentary democracy the way out seems to retain parliamentary democracy and to prescribe state socialism by the law of the constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of a parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Political Democracy of Ambedkar

We all know that democracy is a wider phenomenon. The term democracy is a combination of two Greek word *demos* and *kratein* which means 'Rule by the people'. Democracy as a form of government implies that the ultimate authority of governance in this system is vested in common people. Ambedkar may be considered as the exponent of the radical theory of democracy. He sought to broaden the scope of our democracy with redefining its essential condition. His vision of democracy was not merely limited to the universal adult suffrage with regular elections with some intervals. He expanded the notion of equality of political rights to equality of social and economic opportunity. It would be pertinent to mention here why India has been characterised as flawed democracy and not a full-fledged democracy because India has

not been able to bring in social and economic democracy. According to Valerian Rodrigues "Social and economic democracy is the tissue and fibre of political democracy. The tougher the tissue and the fibre, the greater the strength of the body". He further emphasizes that the formal and superficial form of democracy is the reason for the failure of democracy in many countries.<sup>10</sup>

#### 5. Ambedkar and Constitution:

In the constitution of India, Ambedkar visualised the very idea of the welfare state through fundamental rights and directive principles. Protection of minority rights was also a central idea of Ambedkar. He tries to incorporate as many provisions to the constitution to deal with these issues. Dr Babasaheb argued that it is entirely wrong to concentrate all our attention on the political independence of our country and to forget the serious problem of social and economic independence. It is suicidal to imagine that political independence necessarily means real all-sided freedom. (The Times of India 21 March 1940).<sup>11</sup>

His thoughts of nationalism and patriotism implied economic, political, social and cultural equality and liberty and moral values. His thought and nationalism demanded not only the liberation of every poor person of the country but also the freedom of all subjugated masses, even in free countries. Dr, Babasaheb Ambedkar emphasised that people should make political democracy a social and economic democracy.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6. Social Democracy of Ambedkar

"Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of its social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognises liberty, quality and fraternity as the principles of life". He believed that a democracy, which enslaves the working class, a class that is devoid of education which is devoid of means of life, which is devoid of any power of organisation, which is devoid of intelligence, is no more democracy but a mockery of democracy. in the Hindu social order: its essential principles', Dr Ambedkar claimed that in the social order, there is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. He believes that Manusmriti has deprived the common men, especially Shudras. He pointed out that Manusmriti supports slavery in the form of social inequality. He was one of the victims of social exploitation and injustice of Hindu society. Therefore, he adopts the Buddhist way of life and ensuring a new society based on harmony and happiness.<sup>13</sup>

#### 7. Ambedkar as a Feminist

Ambedkar was though is known to be the icon of Dalit liberation what we often forget him is that he was as much a passionate feminist as he was the leader of Dalits. He was aware of the fact that patriarchal control over female sexuality was the root cause of the persistence of the caste system. That is why in the annihilation of caste, he presented inter-caste marriage as the only real remedy to abolish the caste system. When he talks about the liberation of women, his vision does

<sup>10</sup> Valerian Rodrigues, The essential writings of B.R Ambedkar, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, 961-64

<sup>11</sup> Ibid,62

<sup>12</sup> Ibid,63

<sup>13</sup> See writings and speeches of Ambedkar.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,272

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Babasaheb Works And Speeches vol.1, p 411-412

include the women's rights as a whole with the special focus on the Dalit women. He consistently argued that political reforms had to start with the social reforms. Socially and culturally women's in the Indian society is the vulnerable section. He has recognised the profound connection between caste discrimination and gender discrimination. He had taken into consideration the serious issue of prostitution which persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century India. He dealt with the issue of Bombay Red light area where many Dalit women sex workers were living inhuman life. He emphasised on the issue that no women would like to involve in the profession of prostitution willingly. It is the circumstances that force them into it. Apart from that, he also promoted the women of Kamptipura to stand up for their interest because in this challenging juncture, even their male members would not help them. It shows how all-pervasive patriarchy is rooted in Indian society.

### 8. Democratic Nationalism of Ambedkar:

Ambedkar was seriously involved in deconstructing the hegemonic notion of the then nationalism. Ambedkar boldly critiqued the mainstream 'Indian Nationalism' and proffered and practised coherent theory of liberation of nation and nationalism.<sup>14</sup> He made a clear distinction between the freedom of the country and of the people of that country which the western writers on political sciences overlooked. His main stress was on the freedom of the people. For him without freedom of the people, nationalism becomes a means of internal slavery, forced labour and organized tyranny for the poor and servile classes. Ambedkar had no faith in the word cry of the British for democracy and independence. He knew that he would have to fight both the caste Hindus and the British Government for the respect of political rights. He also made it clear that "It is entirely wrong to concentrate all our attention on the political independence of our country and to forget the foremost serious problem of social and economic independence. It is suicidal to imagine that political independence necessarily means real all-sided freedom".<sup>15</sup>

For Ambedkar, caste was against the spirit of nationalism. "Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste bound."<sup>16</sup> This caste feeling was the mother of communalism. To him, nationalism meant the negation of caste spirit and caste spirit was nothing but deep-rooted communalism. He regarded that communal feeling were a menace to national integration. He was convinced that nationalism was to receive its perfect harmony in the realisation of the social brotherhood of men irrespective of caste colour and creed.<sup>17</sup>

Ambedkar has expressed his feelings as regards nationalism, in terms of majority and minority. According to him, Indian nationalism has developed a new doctrine which he called the divine right of the majority to rule the minorities according to the wishes of the majority. He remarked, "Any claim for the sharing of power by the minority is called

communalism while monopolising the whole power by the majority is called nationalism." He condemned all kind of hypocrisy and oppression in the name of religion and nationalism. Though Ambedkar was not with the nationalist movement started in the country. Still, he was not always supporting the government. He was afraid that the British would choose to advertise our unfortunate conditions, not with the object of removing them, but only as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India.<sup>18</sup>

### 9. Conclusion

Babasaheb Ambedkar, a jurist, economist, politician, and social reformer had immense contributions to India's development. However, his inclusive vision of democracy is one of the most important contributions to Indian society. Babasaheb Ambedkar's radical views on social inclusion are very relevant even today and it has made a great impact on our Indian economic and social policymaking. His vision needs to reach its logical conclusion only then our society can progress in its true sense.

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<sup>14</sup>Aloysius, 'Ambedkar on Nation and Nationalism', (critical quest: New Delhi, 2009),3-4

<sup>15</sup> Times of India, Bombay, 21 March, 1940

<sup>16</sup> B.R Ambedkar, "Annihilation of caste", (Critical Quest: New Delhi, 2007) p-37

<sup>17</sup>W.N Kuber, "Ambedkar a critical study" (people's publishing house: New Delhi, 2009) ,p-153

<sup>18</sup> Ibid,154