

Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar : His Concepts of Social Democracy and Doctrine of Democratic Humanism

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Abstract

Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar is one of the greatest political thinkers and social revolutionaries that modern India has ever produced. He was the foremost exponent and expounder of social democracy based on basic human values and freedom, liberty, equality and human dignity. He considered the institution of caste system as the greatest social evil and a major stumbling block in the path of a cohesive national psyche obstructing an inclusive and emancipated society which can only be possible by complete annihilation of caste. He waged a relentless struggle against the then prevailing dehumanised social order in India where a vast multitude of people belonging to the depressed communities were treated less than humans and sub humans for which he wanted to abolish the worthless birth graded status and its functions. Being the chief architect of the democratic Constitution of independent India, he inculcated in it the basic values such as the sovereign equality of every individual, self-respect, human dignity and reclamation of human personality. Keeping this in mind, this paper makes an honest and earnest endeavour to foreground his concept of democratic humanism as the guiding principle in achieving the goal of social democracy as a necessary precondition to political democracy.

Keywords: *Democratic humanism, Social democracy, Autochthon, Aborigines, Brahminical social order, Social exclusion, Constitutional exclusiveness, Dialectical human social interaction, Caste hierarchy, Dalitbahujan*

Introduction

The nature and character of a particular society and its people are known from its Constitution. A Constitution is the mirror of the socio-economic and political culture of that particular nation or society. Constitutions of different countries of the world are born in the bosom of the time, in the womb of socio-cultural exigencies, whose embryonic genesis gets fertilized in the vision of a great visionary. The emancipatory socio-economic and political philosophy and great humanitarian value and freedom enshrined in the Indian Constitution are the brain child of India's greatest visionary and messiah Bharatratna Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar. His greatest contribution to the world of constitutionalism and political philosophy is social democracy and the doctrine of democratic humanism that precisely envisages basic human value, dignity and freedom. In 1930 at a Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur he urged independence for India and the first leader to urge the British to leave. He was made the first Law Minister of independent India in Nehru's Cabinet and he was the first untouchable to become the Cabinet Minister of independent India. He also wrote some books in order to project his point of view. Of these, *Annihilation of Caste*(1936), *Who were Shudras?*, *The Untouchables* (1948), and *Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957) are quite famous. He died on 6 December, 1956. With his death the era of selfless crusade for the cause of the depressed class and the downtrodden came to an end. In 1990 he was bestowed with Bharat Ratna and the year 1990-1991 was observed as the "Year of Social Justice" in India in the memory of Dr. Ambedkar. The present paper seeks to provide a contextual interpretation of the democratic thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar and his concept of democratic humanism and social democracy as is reflected in his numerous tracts written over a period of time and his various other activities that have a clear manifestation in the mission and vision of our democratic constitution.

Life Sketch

A multifaceted genius, a distinguished economist, a reputed author, a great jurist, an eminent lawyer, an excellent orator, an outstanding constitutionalist, an astute parliamentarian, a champion of social justice, a messiah for weaker sections of the society and a great political leader Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in a village named Ambedgaon in

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Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. His parents belonged to the scheduled caste community of Sakbal Mahar. His father's name was Ramji Maloji Sankpal and mother's name Bhima Bai. His mother died when he was 6 years of age. His father after retirement from the British army continued as a school teacher. Among the galaxy of thinkers in modern India, Dr. Ambedkar stands on a pedestal quite different from others. He was by all standards a great visionary, statesman, a creative thinker, an inclusive analyst and an extraordinary student of history, economics, sociology, philosophy, law and politics. He waged a relentless struggle against the denial of social justice, economic opportunities, and human dignity to the marginalised classes throughout India. He stood for the social equality, economic emancipation and political freedom of the downtrodden millions, a task never undertaken by any high caste Hindu leader with so much vigour and force. Thus he struggled all through his life to establish a new social order based on principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. Besides being the chief architect of modern Indian Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was a prolific writer and author, who has the distinctive credit of authoring many hidden treasures to the world of academics which includes: 'Problem of Rupee', 'Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India', 'Castes in India', 'Small Holdings and Their Remedies' and a large number of occasional Research Papers which reflecting his revolutionary thoughts and ideas.

Young Bhimrao : A Social Democrat

Bhimrao Ambedkar had to face a number of problems and difficulties due to the then prevailing evil practices and customs of a hierarchical Hindu social order. The Indian society particularly the Hindu social order before the colonial rule was mostly dominated by 'Brahminical hegemony' and the social system was divided and subdivided into different caste categories and units. Social chemistry in Indian society was shaped by heinous social groupings, large scale inequality among different social categories and human relations was more asymmetrical than bound by common brotherhood and fraternity. During those days the Autochtons, the Dalits were segregated from others in every field of action. Hindu social practices and customs blinded by purity and notions of pollution did not even allow the upper caste people to talk to the Autochtons or the Dalit people. This purity and pollution was also widely prevalent in schools

and educational institutions where the upper caste students were not talking to the Dalit students (the untouchables) as they believed that their talking with Dalit students would pollute them. Most heinous practices and beliefs such as books and other belongings of the Dalit students would not be touched by the rest of the students. Such a society with its highly graded inequality, hatred casteist feeling perpetuated utmost inhuman treatment on an untouchable Mahar boy, who was segregated in the school in his boyhood and thrown out of his cart, ousted from hostel, hotel and temple precisely because of his sin of being a low born in the stratified Indian society. A child, Bhimrao was terrible shocked with such discriminatory behaviour and attitude of his fellow peers at school which germinated the seeds of discontent in the minds of a tiny tot Bhimrao who vowed to bring a social renaissance and to rescue the chaotic social order towards a humanistic society. Such inhuman culture and social anarchy revolted the mind of this untouchable young boy, who wanted to make the upside down, of this all pervading monster by bringing about a social renaissance.

The progressive and reformist ideas of Bhimrao Ramjee received a moral boost from one of his reformist Brahmin teacher who played an instrumental role in equipping him (Bhimrao) psychologically in his mission of social reform and social revolution and humanising the then Indian society. This teacher also took personal care of Bhimrao in doing better in scoring in studies than the upper caste students. Being overwhelmed and deeply impressed by the support of the said teacher Bhimrao latter added to his name, the surname of that teacher namely Ambedkar. Besides, another reformist teacher by name Krishnaji Arjun, who was a social revolutionary and reformist and also contributed immensely in making Bhimrao as a greatest reformer and revolutionary.

Amidst social ostracism and financial distress, experiencing a lot of hardship and hurdles, Bhimrao completed his BA from Elphinstone College in Bombay and that was due to the patronage of Maharaja of Baroda. After completing his graduation, he joined the Maharaja's civil service. In the workplace also he faced humiliation and caste segregation. Here the Maharaja of Baroda sent him to USA for higher study where he completed his MA and Doctoral Degree from the Colombia University in 1916. Though he was interested in further study but

as per the contract he had to return to serve the State of Baroda. His new higher position in the State Government of Baroda also had no respite from caste segregation and humiliation as his subordinates threw files on table and declined to serve water to him. His complaint to the Maharaja on this issue had no effect and finding no way out and being disgusted and with utmost frustration Bhimrao left Baroda for Bombay. In 1918 he joined Sydenham College, Bombay as Professor of Political Economy where he became highly popular among the students for his brilliancy but had to resign in 1920 owing to a highly discriminatory and regressive social environment and left for London to study law and economics. On his joining London School of Economics and Political Science, he received financial assistance from Maharaja of Kolhapur and completed his M.Sc in Economics from University of London in 1921. As fortune favours the brave, Bhimrao was appointed as Finance Minister by Maharaja of Baroda which was a rare distinction for him and the whole of untouchable community. Here also he was unacceptable to the caste-minded Hindus and his towering achievement did not free him from the stigma of social disability. Such deplorable social environment revolted the mind of young Bhimrao who vowed to bring to an end the evils of untouchability towards securing a better humanistic society. In his crusade against salvaging Hindu social order he was greatly influenced by Lord Buddha, Sant Kabir Das and Jyotirao Govindrao Phule. His agenda of anti-colonialism got intertwined with his agenda of annihilation of caste (Ilaiah, 1998, p. 269).

As a mark of protest and revolt against the social tyranny and social injustice he advocated his followers to come out of the dragon of Hindu social and religious orthodoxy and accept Buddhism which could help them in establishing social democracy. He strongly believed that political democracy has no meaning without social democracy. He argued that the theory of democracy be used as a means to provide social justice to the vast multitude of depressed and socially marginalised. From a theoretical point of view, democracy was most sensitive to the demand for political participation (Rousseau's Social Contract) and Equal Rights of Citizenship (Thomas Paine). Ambedkar believed that equality in political domain will continue to be a misnomer unless the social order and institutions based on prejudices, natural hierarchy and inequality are dismantled to the core. For long the advocate of democracy believed that equality in the political domain would go hand in hand with social equality. Of

late, the champion of democracy emphasised the value of social equality of a non-hierarchical society; and the two programmes were placed alongside each other in the struggles of the discriminated people as well (Mahajan, 1998). To Ambedkar unless the socially discriminated people are not mainstreamed in a democratic form of society, the idea of democratic form of Government would be highly counter-productive. He argued that without social democracy, the framework for political democracy and independence will carry no value and indeed be a misfit. He strongly argued that democracy is not merely a form of government but essentially a form of society (Ambedkar, 1943, p. 36).

He believed that democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness, resulting in the distinction between the privileged and unprivileged (Ambedkar, 1943, p. 36). To Ambedkar in a highly structured society like India, politics is nothing but 'theology in action' and unless it is completely abandoned and society is not completely secularised, representative government could not function and sustain. He argued that the principle of equality is grossly violated with treating the unequals equally that complicates the task of democracy. To Ambedkar, socialisation in the context of deprivation and discrimination deprives the depressed class people and their ability to even aspire for their entitlement and their legitimate positions in the government and in society. In an environment of inequality of background, conditions, and social positions, the oppressed and discriminated people cannot compete successfully with the members of the better-off social groups. In such an unequal and discriminatory environment, the members of the dominant communities have always an edge over the others. In order to salvage a dilapidated society and strengthen the democracy, Ambedkar strongly advocated for the concept of positive discrimination, a special privilege for the depressed communities to compensate for the unequal initial advantage enjoyed by the privileged groups. He emphasised positive discrimination as essential for realisation of social democracy and cautioned that without the principle of equality and social justice neither democracy can triumph nor unity of the country could be achieved if social anarchy based on untouchability and casteism continue to prevail in the new India in the same form and magnitude.

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar is the product of his time, and child of this social renaissance. He is the man, whose caste had been 'dehumanised, demoralized

and devitalized for ages' and became saviour of its society and polity and shaped the nation's democratic tradition with highly humanitarian and ethical standard that were reflected in the democratic constitution drafted by him. To put in the words of a famous jurist of India N.A. Palkhiwala that Independent India witnessed this great son of mother India as the chief architect of constitutional skill and fidelity, designing the structure 'which has been reared for immortality'.

His Concept of Democratic Humanism as Reflected in the Constitution of India

The idea for a draft Constitution by a duly elected Constituent Assembly although germinated in the minds of Dr. M.N. Roy, a radical humanist but the leading responsibility of drafting such a Constitution for India on the basis of basic human values and freedom was the handiwork of a social democrat Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Yet a kind of national amnesia has loomed large all over the country on the question as to how, when, and by whom our Constitution was framed? On this particular baffling question most Indians are still confused. But the most shocking thing is the ruling elites coupled with upper caste Hindus are hell bent to deny and to derecognise even this historical fact and his official status by wiping out all easily available official records. They are taking well calculated steps to create a bundle of false and fabricated documents. They did not want to give any importance or to attach any meaningful significance to the role and value of the position of the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. This office, as if, was a mere rubber stamp like the office of the British Queen (Biswas, 1997, p. 3).

One such disrobing of the fact is primarily noticed in the works of M.O. Mathai, who in his book *Reminiscences of Nehru Age* has belittled the significant role of Dr. Ambedkar in making of Indian Constitution. Mathai wrote "It was Ambedkar who piloted the Constitution Bill in the Constituent Assembly" (Mathai, 1978). Mathai's statement though without any falsehood but it is half-truth which does not recognise the instrumental role played by Dr. Ambedkar in making of the Constitution of India. Besides M.O. Mathai, authors like Prof. V.D. Mahajan, D.C. Ahir, K.L. Chanchreek and Arun Shourie also neglected the very fact of the pioneering role of Ambedkar in Constitution making. Shourie, a foreign-root Brahmin journalist has blatantly disrobed the fact in one of his

newspaper article 'Which of the Many Ambedkars is the Author?' in which he has accredited the credit to Sir B.N. Rau and Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyaras playing a significant role in making of the Constitution. Thus these critics and authors of higher caste not merely distorted the fact but tried all factors of permutations and combinations to disprove Ambedkar as the chief architect of the modern Indian Constitution. However such erosion and distortion of fact pertaining to Ambedkar's contribution in making of the Constitution by all such higher caste intellectuals and authors has been well exposed by Dhanajay Keer, another Brahmin biographer of Dr. Ambedkar admitting the gigantic role of Ambedkar in the making of the Constitution of India. He has written that,

an untouchable who was kicked out of his cart and who was segregated in schools in his boyhood, who was insulted as Professor in the college and ousted from hotels, hostels, schools and temples in his youth as a despicable Mahar...became now the first Law Minister of a free nation and the chief architect of the Constitution”(Keer, 1971, p. 397).

However the fact remains that Dr. Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Bengal Provincial Legislature in 1946. He acquired the rare opportunity and privilege to assume the office of the 'Chairman of the Drafting Committee' of the Constituent Assembly and played the most vital role as the chief architect of India's new Legal Testament. There was no better or capable and meritorious person in India than Dr. Ambedkar to assume the office with plenitude of responsibility. Endowed with superior brilliance on the subject called Constitutional Law, Dr. Ambedkar was well-equipped to undertake the job of framing the new Constitution of free India. He spent his work-weary nights on sleepless pillows for getting himself associated with the Constitution making. However the governing class people have ignored his tirelessly active role in making of Indian Constitution(Biswas, 1997, p. 3).

Gifted with creative talent and amazing memory, his scholarship was unparalleled and incomparable to anyone. Beverley Nichols rightly observed such extraordinary ability of Dr. Ambedkar, who wrote in *Verdict of India, 1944* that "To compare the average oration of Congress Politician with a speech by Dr. Ambedkar is like comparing a Hindu chant with a fusillade of pistol shots"(Nichols, 1944). His deep intellectual faculty and deep sense of belongingness towards the oppressed people of the society provided him basic

impetus to find the root of the ills of Indian social system. It is his unique union of theory and practice that enabled him to make a proper diagnosis of the terminal ills of the Indian society. Thus, he wanted to prescribe the right kind of panacea to the horrifying, terrible common man problems and misery. He advocated for a common, holistic, integral humane approach to the whole problem. So he made a brilliant choice in selecting some of sensitive canons of humanism like individualism, self-consciousness, self-respect and dignity, basic human values and democratic aspiration as to be the guiding and governing principle in framing the legal code of conduct for a humane India.

Democratic Humanism: An Inroad to Social Democracy

The principal objective of a democratic society is to humanize the social fabric and democratize each human of the whole edifice. How can a society be a democratic one where majority of its people like limbs of the body, cannot properly exchange either their place or function. Such inhuman/pitiable condition of man in society observed Dr. Ambedkar has been held hostage by the monster of caste perpetuated by the Brahminical Social Order of the Hindu society. Witnessing this inherent contradiction of a 'dehumanised Indian society' where a vast multitude of humans are treated as sub-human and less than humans, he apprehended political freedom to bring about 'democracy' in its true sense of the term. He argued independent India to be democratic, must recognise the basic human values, must humanise its society first. He said how can a country like India mostly governed by the notion of caste and creed and does not have a sense of individualism, self-consciousness, self-respect and democratic aspiration could be democratic and have a democratic Constitution. So he emphasised the new Constitution of India to carry the essence of translating India into a social democracy based on the principle of democratic humanism. So he worked with a missionary zeal to acquire constitutional provisions to safeguard political power and social recognition for those vast multitudes of people who were being treated as untouchables and suffering from dehumanization (Biswas, 1997, p. 2). His concept of democratic humanism discarded human subordination of any forms and treated every human as useful member of the society and recognised individual as basic unit of the nation rather than caste or creed.

He believed that democratic values could prevail only when there will be total annihilation of both caste and class divisions. The basic unit of a democratic society observed Dr. Ambedkar, must be individual human being, never the caste or creed. The natural rights of man must be respected and each individual must be provided with right to life, liberty and equality. Sovereign equality of man in a free society provides freedom for all, respecting human dignity and social identity through freedom of speech and not having restraints unnecessarily. The cardinal principle of 'democratic humanism' advocates Dr. Ambedkar is to uphold self-respect and human dignity, which have paramount importance in a free society. It is basically a battle for freedom, and a battle for the reclamation of human personality. So he concentrated on the sovereign virtue of having the provision of 'Bills of Rights' in the Constitution that would guarantee basic human freedom for all.

His doctrine of 'democratic humanism' promoting the 'Magna Carta' of human freedom and equality has been incorporated in the democratic Constitution under the exclusive provision of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. Some of the specific articles responding to such exclusive provision refer to Article 15 that abolishes discrimination in using public facilities, Article 16 provides for equal opportunities in public employment, Article 17 provides for abolition of untouchability, Article 19 provides right to life and personal liberty for all, Article 20 protects from double prosecution for same offence, Article 23 provides human dignity, Article 29 prohibits forceful and compulsory acquisition of property, Article 39 provides for equal source of livelihood for men and women, Article 43 provides for a living wage for descent standard of life, Article 45 provides for free and compulsory education to children till the age of 14, Article 46 promotes educational and economic interests for weaker sections, etc. All these constitutional provisions and articles are the clear embodiment of the virtue of 'democratic humanism' that opens the inroad to establish social democracy par-important with economic and political democracy.

The constitutional arrangement and sanction behind the establishment of social democracy has been best reflected and manifested in the soul of our Constitution. The Preamble of the Constitution which reads as follows: Justice; social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and fraternity assuring the

dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. The *raison d'être* behind such a universal declaration is to feel the essence of the democratic humanism, which means all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. But they all are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another with a spirit of brotherhood. Under the new Constitution Dr. Ambedkar wanted to lead a vast group of human beings out of the terrible slavery of caste system into justice and freedom. Democracy, he argued, is another name of equality that strikes a balance between liberty and equality indicating individual freedom in the egalitarian society. Thus the spirit of social democracy is embodied in the soul of the Constitution that guarantees a truly egalitarian society where no class would be under privileged or privileged on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or residence. Political democracy in independent India without dismantling its age-old hierarchical caste ridden social structure would not fit notions of democracy which requires killing altogether the monster of caste from our social fabric. In a caste ridden society each individual with caste/class consciousness will place its caste/class interests above the common interest. This will be the end of justice and fair play. With this back ground, no government can remain truly democratic, if society is much divided into heinous caste categories. Dr. Ambedkar was of strong opinion that a casteless society annihilating all caste order is the necessary precondition for the success of political democracy. He had strong reservations in this point and had differences of opinion with leaders of Indian National Congress like S.N. Banerjee and others regarding an early political independence. Social democracy he opined should be the first step as a stepping stone to political and economic democracy. Political democracy cannot last unless its basis is social democracy.

What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principle of life. It establishes sovereign equality of man and abolishes discrimination of man against man. Social democracy witnesses the march on democratic humanism, on the principle of each man ascounted as one, nobody is more than one. Thus, social democracy opined Dr. Ambedkar abolishes the worthless birth graded status and its function. But the irony is democratic institutions in independent India instead of its old traditional caste institution has yet to embrace the democratic humanist tradition. The apparent paradox lies with the wilful intention of the

political class mainly the caste Hindus by making use of the caste institution as its official doctrine through the policy of reservation for their cheap electoral gains. Today even after 72 years of our Constitution coming into existence, the long cherished dream of Dr. Ambedkar converting India into a social democracy with democratic humanist tradition and its sovereign virtue of human dignity and freedom is yet to be recognized.

Contemporary Challenges to the Goals of Social Democracy

The immediate human problem in contemporary India, the problems of food and hunger, clothing, shelter, health and human dignity still continues to be major concern that unfolds the inside story and real character of our economic and social democracy. The basic human concerns and question of human rights challenges with deplorable social solidarity in India calls for a paradigm shift in the notion of social democracy envisioned by Dr. Ambedkar. The limitation and laxity of a common political approach to the ever-deepening socio-economic crisis and the escalating tyranny of the political class hinders the preservation and perpetuation of our social democracy. Thus the egalitarian social solidarity approach of Dr. Ambedkar, based on the principles of democratic humanism in the contemporary situation needs a realistic assessment that really is passing through an acid test of time. In the first expanding era of globalization and privatization, the vision of Dr. Ambedkar is facing a 'withering away' situation. Economic liberty and social justice has been marshalled by the so called 'merit syndrome' and eclipsed by 'Dronacharyamindset' that in turn has become the real peddlers of the burgeoning and deepening social crisis.

Conclusion

The greatest contribution of Dr. Ambedkar to the world of political and social philosophy is his concept of social democracy and democratic humanism. The twin concepts have provided new insight to the Indian society and democracy by humanising its social fabric and have become a precondition for a successful working of our political democracy. Undoubtedly, his concept of social democracy provided the vast multitude of depressed communities mostly the untouchables, their entitlement and basic rights as human in an inclusive society. He believed that the evils of caste system is a stumbling block in the

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path of a cohesive national psyche and an inclusive and an emancipatory society is impossible without complete annihilation of caste system. Being a foremost exponent and expo under of social democracy he wanted to salvage the Indian society from the scourge of evils of caste system by emphasising the basic human values, dignity and self-respect of all individual as the governing principle of democracy for its triumph. As the chief architect of democratic Constitution of India, he had a clear message to the microscopically minority mainstream society that the modern Indian democratic Constitution based on the principle of equality, liberty, and fraternity allows no place for a savage society governed by traditional caste institutions, a Constitution which is a product of socio-cultural exigency and epithet of democratic humanism. He had an appeal to the depressed classes to preserve and allow the 'caravan of social movement' to remain lively and continue, that was brought through miseries and utmost difficulty. All conscious citizens of India, who are striving for 'people-centered governance' and 'humane India', must uphold the spirit of democratic humanism enshrined in our Constitution. Under no circumstances these basic human values and dignity should be sacrificed and surrendered to the neo-imperial grand global design.

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