



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Indian Constitution

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Abstract: "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 is Assembly has to laboriously built up."

It is easy for us to think that these warnings were relevant during the dawn of a new democracy, when the future was uncertain, and they don't hold true for a democracy that is over 67 years old. However, it would serve us well to remind ourselves, that to hold on to what we have we should remain vigilant to all possible threats.

Keywords: Constitution, Democracy, Dictatorship, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,

Introduction

DR Ambedkar was a strong advocate of the parliamentary form of government right from the inception of the Government of India Act of 1935. He firmly believed that the parliamentary system of government alone can usher in an egalitarian society through the application of the principles of social democracy. Dr Ambedkar's social democracy comprised politicians, political parties with high standards of political morality, honesty and integrity and strong and highly responsible Opposition party or parties committed to the cause of the downtrodden and depressed classes. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution echoes the principles of parliamentary democracy. It reads:

We the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens—

Justice, Social, Economic and Political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, Equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all—Fraternity, assuring the dignity of Individual and the Unity of the Nation, in our Constituent Assembly this 26th day of November, 1949 do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution.

Dr Ambedkar was a strong advocate of the federal structure of the Union and States based on the principles of a strong Centre and independent States. Dr Ambedkar also did great service to the nation by proposing the institution of a unified judicial system and common All India Services with a view to strengthen national unity and integrity.

Due to his seminal role in the framing of the Indian Constitution, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar is popularly known all over India as the chief architect of the Indian



Constitution. His efforts to eradicate social evils were remarkable and that is why he is called the “messiah” of the Dalits and downtrodden in India. Dr Ambedkar was appointed the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and outlawing all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Constituent Assembly’s support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs for members of the SC and ST. Ambedkar kept the clauses of the Constitution flexible so that amendments could be made as and when the situation demanded. He provided an inspiring Preamble to the Constitution ensuring justice, social, economic and political, liberty, equality and fraternity. The creation of an egalitarian social order, however, remains an unfulfilled wishful thinking to this day.

Dr Ambedkar was not only a learned scholar and an eminent jurist but also a revolutionary who fought against social evils like untouchability and caste restrictions. Throughout his life, he battled social discrimination while upholding the rights of the Dalits and other socially backward classes. He was not only a great national leader but also a distinguished scholar of international repute. He not only led various social movements for the upliftment of the depressed sections of the Indian society but also contributed to the understanding of the socio-economic and political problems of India through his scholarly works on caste, religion, culture,

constitutional law and economic development. As a matter of fact he was an economist and his various scholarly works and speeches indicate his deep understanding of the problems faced by the Indian society. He was appointed as the nation’s first Law Minister and was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1990.¹

On August 29, 1947 Dr. Ambedkar was appointed the Chairman of the Drafting Committee that was constituted by Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for independent India. The draft Constitution was the result of the collective efforts of a galaxy of great leaders and legal scholars in the Constituent Assembly such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, B.R. Ambedkar, Sardar Patel, B.N. Rao, Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar etc. The purpose of this paper is to examine the contribution of Dr Ambedkar only to the Indian Constitution.

Dr Ambedkar played a seminal role in the framing of the Indian Constitution. He used all his experience and knowledge in drafting the Constitution. In his capacity as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he hammered out a comprehensive workable Constitution into which he incorporated his valuable views. He gave free India its legal framework, and the people, the basis of their freedom. To this end, his contribution was significant, substantial, and spectacular.² Dr Ambedkar’s contribution to the evolution of free India lies in his striving for ensuring justice—social, economic and political—for one and all..

Parliamentary Democracy

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Protective Discrimination/Reservation

The real contribution of Ambedkar is reflected in the protective discrimination scheme or the reservation policy of the

government envisaged under some provisions of Part III and many of Part IV dealing with the constitutional mandate to ameliorate the condition of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the other backward classes. Provisions like Article 17 prohibiting untouchability, Article 30 dealing with the protection of minorities are some of the notable examples.

Articles 15(4) and 16 (4) of Part III and Part XI, and Schedule V and VI dealing with the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes speak clearly about the substantial and significant contribution of Ambedkar for the development of untouchables. Ambedkar made it his life's mission to uplift the untouchables and other downtrodden masses from the unequal position of inferiority to that of equal position of parity in socio-economic status with high-caste Hindus. For achieving this goal the reservation policy or the scheme of protective discrimination was advocated and implemented by him for ten years at least to ameliorate the conditions of the various depressed and down-trodden sections of Hindu society.

State Socialism

DR Ambedkar advocated his economic doctrine of "state socialism" in the draft Constitution. He proposed state ownership of agriculture with a collectivised method of cultivation and a modified form of state socialism in the field of industry. But due to strong opposition in the Constitution Assembly, he could not incorporate his scheme of state socialism under the fundamental rights as a part of the Constitution.

In 1948, Dr Ambedkar presented the draft Constitution before the people of India; it was adopted on November 26,



1949 by the Constituent Assembly in the name of the people of India and came into force on January 26, 1950 marking the beginning of a new era in the history of India. Speaking after the completion of his work, Ambedkar said: "I feel the Constitution is workable; it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time."⁶ It has been in effect since January 26, 1950, which is celebrated as the Republic Day in India.

The first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, praised the services rendered by Dr Ambedkar in the making of the Constitution and said:

I have carefully watched the day-to-day activities from the presidential seat. Therefore, I appreciate more than others with how much dedication and vitality this task has been carried out by the Drafting Committee and by its chairman Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar in particular. We never did a better thing than having Dr Ambedkar on the Drafting Committee and selecting him as its chairman.

The Columbia University at its Special convocation on June 5, 1952 conferred the LL.D. degree (Honoris Causa) on Dr Ambedkar in recognition of his drafting the Constitution of India. The citation read:

The degree is being conferred in recognition of the work done by him in connection with the drafting of India's Constitution.

The University hailed him as "one of India's leading citizens, a great social reformer and valiant upholder of human rights".

National Integration

In the Draft Constitution Dr. Ambedkar prescribed single citizenship, a single judiciary and uniformity in fundamental Laws to integrate Indian society which was not only divided into caste and class, but also into regions, religions, languages, traditions and cultures. Therefore, a strong Centre was indispensable to maintain territorial integrity and administrative discipline. However, in the Draft Constitution he suggested the acceptance of Hindi in the 'nagiri' script as the National Language of India. When it was finally decided that India should be divided into India and Pakistan, Dr. Ambedkar at that time demanded the division of Punjab and Bengal, and the territories to be added to India.

A pragmatist to the core, Ambedkar believed that in the absence of economic and social justice political independence would not bring about their social solidarity or, national integration. He advocated the abolition of privileges on the basis of caste or status and vigorously fought for the liberty and dignity of the individual. At the same time, he was equally force-full in his advocacy of the unity of the nation.

Ambedkar issued three warnings, and believed paying heed to them was critical to ensure our democratic institutions did not get subverted. In the past 65 years, we have often trifled with and sometimes totally disregarded these warnings. Luckily, the strength of these institutions was enough to avoid permanent damage from our indiscretions. However, as we gear up for our 16th general elections, let us take another look at where we stand with respect to these warnings.

The first warning was to do away with all methods of revolution, including the



Gandhian method of Satyagraha. Ambedkar believed that while these methods were warranted under the British Raj, there was no place for them when constitutional methods were at our disposal after Independence. Let us look at the two methods of revolution – violent and non-violent – separately.

India has witnessed sporadic armed rebellions throughout its history. It started with the peasant revolt in Telangana, and even today, 67 years after independence, we are still dealing with armed uprisings in some areas, mostly concentrated in the Naxal belt and parts of Kashmir and the Northeast. Though these activities haven't had a drastic effect on the overall democratic processes, they have certainly had a noteworthy localised impact.

Gandhian methods, on the other hand, have been more common, with far greater acceptance. In 2011, Anna Hazare and his anti-corruption movement used Satyagraha to compel the government to pass the Jan Lokpal bill. Although a lot of people believed their cause was noble and justified, some saw it as unwarranted infringement of civil society on legislative prerogative. It can also be argued that this movement was partly responsible for the policy paralysis, experienced by the current government over the past few years. Most recently, Arvind Kejriwal, while chief minister of Delhi, tried to use Satyagraha as a tool to pressure the central government into granting full statehood to Delhi. These methods, irrespective of their noble agenda, do fall in the grey area, and should be used as the final resort instead of the first one.

"If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my

judgment we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and Satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us."

The second warning was to avoid hero-worship, regardless of how great or tall the leader is. Ambedkar believed hero-worship was a sure way to the degradation of democratic institutions, and would eventually lead to dictatorship. India has already gone down this path with Indira Gandhi. The 'bhakti' of her followers made her believe she was greater and more important than the institutions she represented. The country nearly saw the death of democracy when she decided to enforce the emergency in June 1975. We were lucky the suspension lasted just 21 months, and in the subsequent elections she was made to realise her mistake. One would believe a country that witnessed such an event would have learnt from it. But based on what we're seeing in these elections, that doesn't seem to be the case. A large part of the Indian population seems more than eager to put themselves, along with many things this country stands for, at the feet of the frontrunner, Narendra Modi. The legion of Modi's 'bhakts' and their blind 'bhakti' is second only to what Indira Gandhi managed in her time.



"There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish Patriot Daniel O'Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship."

The third warning was that India should not just remain content with political democracy, but strive for social democracy as well. Ambedkar said if we as a society continue to deny equality in our social and economic life, then this could one day become a threat to our political democracy. Since independence all governments have claimed to pursue the cause of social and economic equality; however, the progress made so far is hardly adequate. And though this might not seem as a major threat right now, if this issue is consistently ignored, it has the potential to jeopardize our political democracy.

"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 is Assembly has to laboriously built up."

It is easy for us to think that these warnings were relevant during the dawn of a new democracy, when the future was uncertain, and they don't hold true for a democracy that is over 60 years old. However, it would serve us well to remind ourselves, that to hold on to what we have we should remain vigilant to all possible threats, including the ones mentioned above.

Conclusion

To conclude, Dr Ambedkar's drafting of the Indian Constitution has enabled the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discriminations. Due to all these outstanding contributions Dr Ambedkar can be rightly called the architect of the Indian Constitution. None-the less, it is an undeniable fact that Dr Ambedkar's dream of the creation of an egalitarian social order still remains unfulfilled despite the extended period of reservation for SCs and STs.

The contribution of Dr. Ambedkar in Indian Democracy is not to be forgotten. As a chairman of the Constitutional Committee he gave a shape to our country of a complete Sovereign, Democratic and Republic based on adult franchise. Ambedkar's name will be



written in golden letters in the history of India as a creator of social justice. This fact is doubtless. He was not only the man of age and builder of the Constitution but also the creator of social justice and betterment of the downtrodden. He was one of the few sons in the History of India that he can be said to the gift of Indian freedom movement.

If Mahatma Gandhi gave direction and lesson of morality then Baba Saheb gave shape to social aspect without exploitation. In true sense of the word, he gave democratic and anti caste aim. He spent his whole life for the betterment of the poor, exploited, untouchables and troubled classes. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to the Indian Constitution is undoubtedly of the highest order. Indeed he deserved to be called the "father or the Chief Architect" of the Indian Constitution.

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