



## Dr. Ambedkar democracy and political vision in reality

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**Abstract :** Ambedkar belonged to the liberal political tradition. He was an uncompromising individualist conditioned in the legacy of J. S. Mill. Self-government was no mere transfer of political power from the colonial establishment; it was to be attained by facilitating a share for the excluded sections in the operation of the instrumentality of the state, which means political empowerment of the depressed classes. The problem of the depressed classes was described as predominantly a political one rather than a social one. He was attached considerable significance to political power of the depressed classes. He was concerned with the sharing of political power between the depressed classes and the others. Stressing on the necessity for politics of acute bargaining, he expressed as, "Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention

Ambedkar is influenced by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three grand traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, Conservative and Radical. The unique features about him is political philosophy is that he has transcended all these traditions. In 1917, it was a time when the British were expanding the participation of various groups in the administration and Legislatures. It was in 1919 that Ambedkar for the first time appeared for the rights of Depressed Classes soon having returned to India. It was the formative stage of reservation policy that culminated in a proper and exhaustive policy in the Constitution of India in 1950, for which he made systematic intellectual efforts.

**Key Words;** Historical aspects, Self-governance, Social justice, democracy and vision of ambedkar. etc

### Introduction

Ambedkar belonged to the liberal political tradition. He was an uncompromising individualist conditioned in the legacy of J. S. Mill.

Self-government was no mere transfer of political power from the colonial establishment; it was to be attained by facilitating a share for the excluded sections in the operation of the instrumentality of the state, which means



political empowerment of the depressed classes. Ambedkar attached considerable significance to political power proper, for the plight of the depressed classes can be overcome only by their concerted political action by placing themselves as a third force between the Congress and the Socialists. Along with India gaining dominion status, Ambedkar was concerned with the sharing of political power between the depressed classes and the others in the proposed plan. Thus, the problem of the depressed classes was described as predominantly a political one rather than a social one. Protection of the depressed classes could be ensured only by the scheduled castes placing themselves as a third or fourth party between the British colonial state, Indian society and the Muslims. Stressing on the necessity for politics of acute bargaining, he expressed as, "Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention<sup>1</sup>

Ambedkar belonged to the liberal political tradition. He was an uncompromising individualist conditioned in the legacy of J. S. Mill. Self-government was no mere transfer of political power from the colonial establishment; it was to be attained by facilitating a share for the excluded sections in the operation of the instrumentality of the state, which means political empowerment of the depressed classes. Ambedkar attached considerable significance to political power proper, for the plight of the depressed classes can be

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Ambedkar is influenced by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three grand traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, Conservative and Radical. The unique features about him is political philosophy is that he has transcended all these traditions. He was influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, the pragmatic thinker of American and the teacher of Ambedkar. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman had considerable impact on his thoughts. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative thinker of British, though we can't brand Ambedkar as conservative. Ambedkar's notion of liberty comes close to T.H.

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<sup>1</sup> Round Table Conference, First Session. 12.1 1.1930 to 19.01.1931, Proceedings, pp-123-129.

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<sup>2</sup> Round Table Conference, First Session. 12.1 1.1930 to 19.01.1931, Proceedings, pp-123-129.



Green who is an eminent political philosopher.

Ambedkar's political philosophy is primarily ethical and religious. He thoroughly explored the Indian traditions and its philosophical systems in a unique manner. He developed political concepts like democracy, justice, state and rights from his understanding of Indian society and the functioning of its institutions on the moral and ethical grounds. He is very critical of the institution of caste, which influences all the spheres of individual's life and liberty and the Indian society as a whole. He further discussed how the individual was related to the society and how individual's freedom was limited by other social forces. He is critical of authoritarian Hindu social order and argued in favour of democratic society. He probed into the moral and social foundations of India and gave new meaning to the lives of disadvantaged groups of people. He was a rationale thinker. His approach is reason plays a role in his writings, speeches and his actions. The methodology he used is very scientific rather speculative. He was influenced by the assumptions of modernity. He is well informed in many areas of Indian history, polity, culture, anthropology and philosophy. He quotes many thinkers in his writings those who are influenced him.

In 1917, it was a time when the British were expanding the participation of various groups in the administration and Legislatures. It was in 1919 that Ambedkar for the first time appeared for the rights of Depressed Classes soon having returned to India in 1917 after completing his education at Columbia University in USA and The University of London in UK. It was the formative stage of reservation policy that culminated in a

proper and exhaustive policy in the Constitution of India in 1950, for which Ambedkar made systematic intellectual efforts.

A systematic articulation of arguments in favour of remedies against caste discrimination was put forth by Ambedkar in his first statement, to the Southborough Committee in January 1919 at the time of the reform in the Government of India Act 1919. About ten years later an attempt was made to revise the 1919 Act, through a series of Round Table Conferences (RTCs). Ambedkar submitted two statements to the Simon Commission in 29<sup>th</sup> May 1928. During the RTCs in 1930-32 he made various interventions through memorandums in the meetings of the conference which ultimately led to acceptance of reservation in the Central and State legislatures. It was in 1940s that the reservation policy took the definite shape it has today. While the final formation came at the time of framing of India's Constitution in 1947 that spelled out broader issues of safeguards, these statements and interventions, indeed, provide insights to the evolution of reservation policy for SCs. An analyses of these interventions reveal the origin of reservation policy in India and also lessons for the present discussion. These documents in their intellectual exercise are fundamental to the understanding of the malady of Hindu society and the remedies proposed by Ambedkar against denial of equal opportunity and incessant discrimination to untouchables and similar other groups.

As mentioned prior to Ambedkar's intervention in 1919, a few major developments had taken place, which include recognition of Muslims as minority by providing them Separate



Electorates, and recognition of the fact by the British that Indians need to be given some political rights for establishment of self-government under the British. It was in this context that various communities like Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, and Untouchables, started demanding their separate representation in the Legislature.

As mentioned earlier, it was in 1919 that Ambedkar, for the first time, intervened in the formulation of British policies with regard to DCs by presenting a written statement to the South borough Committee appointed to look into the claims of various communities to get franchise rights for representation in Legislatures.

Having shown the distinct identity of Untouchables, the next important concern was to bring out their social conditions which prevented them even to become citizens and thus Ambedkar grounded the case of untouchables in the denial of citizenship rights. Ambedkar argued:

*Not only the untouchability arrested the growth of personality of untouchables but also comes in the way of their material self-being. It deprived them of certain civil rights. The untouchable is not even a citizen. Citizenship is bundle of rights such as personal liberty, personal security, right to hold private property, equality before law, liberty of conscience, freedom of opinion, and speech, right of assembly, right of*

*representation in country's government, and right to hold office under the state. The untouchability of Untouchables puts these rights far beyond their reach.*

The evidence before the Southborough Committee by Ambedkar had no substantial impact on the Government of India Act, 1919 so far as separate political representation through elections is concerned. A statutory commission would be appointed to enquire into the working of the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in British India. In this context, a commission was appointed in 1928 under the Chairmanship of Simon. It provided another opportunity for Ambedkar to plead the case of DCs but this time, he not only insisted upon separate political representation through election and adoption of alternative franchise system but also to take measures to protect their civil rights. The safeguards were also sought in the field of education and employment in the Public Services with the State.

While submitting a statement concerning safeguards for the protection of the DCs as minority to the Simon Commission, Ambedkar articulating the concerns observed:

*Injustice has been done to the DCs in 1909 by completely ignoring their representation and in 1919 Act by giving them minimal representation as compared to their population in the legislative Council, which was endorsed by*



*Chelmsford Report and Muddiman Committee respectively. Moreover, their representation was based on the process of nomination that was emphatically opposed during 1919. The standing of the community in terms of economic and educational status instead of numerical strength should be taken into account in determining its quota of representation. Thus the lower the standing of a community the greater the electoral advantage to it over the rest<sup>3</sup>.*

Ambedkar has fought extensively as personal struggle to get political empowerment to the Depressed Classes. It is clear in Ambedkar's statement on behalf of the Depressed Classes for political empowerment which is presented to the First Round Table Conference (RTC) as: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

*Mr. Chairman, "... The point of view I will try to put as briefly as I can. It is this that the bureaucratic form of Government in India should be replaced by a Government which will be a Government of the people, by the people and for the people. This statement of the view of the Depressed Classes I am sure will be received with some surprise in certain quarters. The tie that bounds the Depressed Classes to the British has been of a unique character. The Depressed Classes welcomed the British as their deliverers from age long tyranny and*

*oppression by the orthodox Hindus. They fought their battles against the Hindus, the Mussalmans and the Sikhs and won for them this great Empire of India. The British, on their side, assumed the role of trustees for the Depressed Classes. In view of such an intimate relationship between the parties, this change in the attitude of the Depressed Classes towards British Rule in India is undoubtedly a most momentous phenomenon".<sup>4</sup>*

Meanwhile, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Mac Donald, announced his decision known as Communal Award on 4 August 1932 to impart Separate Electorates to the DCs. Along with it he also declared that he would be glad to accept any other solution of the communal problem acceptable to all communities. The Award conceded Separate Electorates to the Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans. Labour, commerce, industry, mining and planting, land holders and universities were also given separate constituencies and fixed seats. It suggested the formation of general constituencies, where all voters except Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians or Europeans were entitled to vote. It was for the first time that the DCs were recognized as a minority.

In this phase, Ambedkar's efforts to put inclusive policies for excluded groups during the making of the constitution for free India by the Constituent Assembly have been discussed. It was the time when the future course of history was to be set in

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<sup>3</sup> Ambedkar B.R. Writing and speeches.

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<sup>4</sup> Extracted from the statement of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar which is made to present to First Round Table Conferences held on 20 November 1930.



motion. As earlier mentioned, Ambedkar termed the cabinet Mission's recommendations regarding SCs as most galling and astounding for two major reasons: (1) not declaring them as minorities and (2) not accepting their long standing demand of separate Electorates. It was in this context that Ambedkar presented a memorandum on the safeguards of SCs to the constituent Assembly on behalf of the All India scheduled castes Federation in 1946. However, he was appointed the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Assembly on 23 December 1947, and drafted and debated the provisions for safeguarding the interests of the SCs in particular and other marginalized sections in general<sup>5</sup>.

The memorandum presented to the constituent Assembly could be thought of as a small constitution for the protection of common citizenry, and attempted to established social democracy and State Socialism. Ambedkar suggested a dual strategy for adopting Inclusive Policy referring to it as safeguards Against Economic exploitation and Safeguards against Social discrimination and Isolation. Here, we observe the widening and maturing perspectives of Ambedkar's formulations. He suggested separate remedies against social discrimination and remedies against economic exploitation. A number of measures are suggested as remedies against social discrimination, the focus of which is equal participation in multiple spheres. As a remedy against economic exploitation he proposed to adopt State

Socialism as a general solution to the problem of poverty and economic exploitation. And it is through this policy that he expected to emancipate the poor in general and SCs in particular and compensate for historical exclusion<sup>6</sup>.

On the question of reservations in Public services, the wisdom of the Constituent Assembly was in favour of some safeguards for the SCs. However, there was a difference of opinion of the House made two points namely-that there shall be equality of opportunity for all the citizens and, there must at the same time be a provision made for the entry of certain communities which have so far been outside the administration. Subsequently, Article 10 of the draft constitution that became Article 16 in the present Constitution was adopted and both the views got combined. It was on the consent of the two communities- Muslims and Christians, in the Advisory Committee that they were not treated as minorities for the purpose of political representation. After a vehement discussion on the issue, during the third reading on Article 16, the word "Backward" instead of Minorities was used and specific safeguards for the claims of the SCs/STs was provided in Article 335. Moreover it was left to the government to make provisions for other Backward communities which have not been included was remarked day Ambedkar in the constituent Assembly

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<sup>5</sup> Ambedkar and Social Justice, Vol. I to Vol. II. Published by the Director, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi.

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<sup>6</sup> Bhatia, K. L. (eds), (1994) Dr. B R Ambedkar: Social Justice and the Indian Constitution. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publication (1994).





while discussing Article 10 of the draft constitution<sup>7</sup>.

Like Ambedkar, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, also admits, "The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure and practices, Consequently, the access of women, particularly those belonging to weaker section including Scheduled Caste / Tribes Other Backward Classes and Minorities .To education, health, and productive resources, among others is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded." Since Ambedkar himself was a victim of oppression and discrimination in all its severity, his views about women's oppression and equal rights are more useful than anybody else's theory based on mere observation for the feminist movement to strengthen its strategy for approaching the systemic challenges and contradictions in a more pragmatic way to bring women to the mainstream<sup>8</sup>.

Ambedkar political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. Social democracy is a way of life, which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles are not to be treated as separate items but in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Unless there is social democracy, power to the people would remain a distant

dream. 'Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy' which means, a way of life which recognize liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life.' In this sense, he defined democracy as a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of people are brought about without bloodshed. In a democratic nation, political participation of its citizens is quite essential and necessary. So participation of the citizens in governance is basic right in democracy. So by participating in the governance, every citizen can have opportunity to protect his basic rights which are universally declared as 'Human Rights'.

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<sup>7</sup> Chamanlal, Dr. Ambedkar, An Ambassador of Humanity, Mainstream, vol. XLVI. No. 8, April 19, 2000, p. 235.

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