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Ambedkar's Idea of Social Democracy and Quest for Distributive Justice

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Abstract:

The main goal of the study is to analyze the idea of B. R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian constitution, regarding Indian democracy particularly social democracy. Analyzing the idea of democracy of Ambedkar in details, it can be found out that Ambedkar wants democracy to be social, economic and political in nature too. He also fought hard for the emancipation of lower caste from the clutches of brahmanical society well marked by Varna system. In his conception of exploitation less society, democracy has an extra-ordinary role which he defined as 'one person, one vote'; and 'one vote, one value'. Democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to her/him, democracy means liberty, equality and fraternity - Ambedkar's definition of democracy had such a tone. This research gives closer and analytical insight into the thoughts of Ambedkar and finds that, for Ambedkar, Social democracy is the means and justice is the end. Ambedkar was also of the view that, Indian freedom is not as necessary as the equilibrium in social setup is required. Finally, after trying everything, he gave a mantra in which he said, Dalit's needs to go for educate, organize and agitate.

1. Early Life

Bhimrao Ramjee Ambedkar was born in December 1891 in the Mahar community, an untouchable caste of Maharashtra. After receiving his early education at Satna and Bombay, he went for higher studies for Columbia University, USA. He obtained his M.A and PhD degrees from Columbia University. Then he conducted research at India office library, London. On return to India, he took up job as a Professor of economics with Sydenham College of Commerce Bombay.

As a member of the untouchable community, he had to face lot of hardships and humiliations, so he took up the cause of untouchables. Dr B.R Ambedkar was one of the very reputed and well acclaimed political thinker and social reformer that India has ever produced. He is popularly known as the 'pioneer' who initiated the 'liberation movement' of roughly sixty-five million untouchables of India. He desperately wants to create an atmosphere where lower caste people can breathe freely without being labeled as untouchables. He fought hard against the system just to secure conducive atmosphere for the downtrodden masses so that they can excel too in every field.

2. Democracy in Social Context

Dr. Ambedkar said, "Democracy is not a form of Govt., but a form of social organization. He was of the opinion that roots of democracy are to be reached in social relationship in terms of the associated life between the people who form the society.

He was strictly against of a small section of the society, who manipulate their cultural symbols of the society for their own gain and promoting their dominance and that process becomes undemocratic and destructive. For him, political democracy is not an END in itself, but the most powerful MEANS to achieve social and Economic ideals in society. He wanted political democracy to be accompanied by social democracy. He gave central importance to social aspects of democracy over political aspects, unlike many others whose discourse on democracy is confined to the political and institutional aspects. Ambedkar paid greater attention to social linkage among people than separation of powers and constitutional safeguards for democracy.

As per Ambedkar, Democracy means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life, another significant contribution of Ambedkar in the process of establishment of social democracy. In his explanation of nature of three cardinal principles of democracy LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY, he was of the view that, these three principles forms a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty can't be divorce from equality & equality can't be divorced by liberty.

Nor can liberty and Equality be divorced from fraternity.

Frozen in the centuries old stratified structure of the Hindu social order, (Varna) the principles of equality and fraternity are yet to find a clear expression and a significant space in the Political democracy of the independent India.

Social life in India is still governed by the principles of birth-based grades inequality that tends to elevate some (Upper Caste) and degrades many (lower caste). Even after more than 68 yrs of India's Independence and widespread anti-untouchability laws, the so called outcastes continue to be subjected to repulsion and all sort of humiliation. They have continuously been deprived of Education, Human Rights, Social status and equal opportunities in the field of Art, Culture, Science and technology.

He was of the view that in Politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life, we will have inequality. In Politics we will recognize the principle of one Man, One vote - one value. But In our social, economic life, we shall by the reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man – one value.

3. Ambedkar Notion of Social Justice

His concept of justice generated from the French Revolution of 1789. Ambedkar's perspective of social justice is based on social democracy which consists of three Virtues of justice namely liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar addressed in the constituent Assembly that the "Third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of the social democracy.

As far as State Socialism of Ambedkar is concerned, He favors:-

- a) State ownership of agricultural and key industries to meet the demands of the poorer strata of the society.
- b) Maintenance of the productive resources by the state.
- c) A just distribution of the common without any distinction of caste and creed.

4. Quest for Distributive Justice

Bhimrao Ambedkar, who was a dominating figure and active organizer of Dalit's struggle for their emancipation from the clutches of the higher strata of the society. His concept of distributive justice was based on the idea of a casteless society.

Ambedkar's main claim is that a society based on the caste system cannot be a "REAL" society because it violates the respect and dignity of individuals. Ambedkar made two attempts to minimize the differences. First on temple entry attempts and the other one is separate electorates. Ambedkar put forward arguments based on the principle of liberty, equality and justice to sustain his case.

For him, Equality means, not the equal status of Varna's, but equal social, political and economic opportunity for all.

There are three components of Ambedkar's theory of distributive justice:

- a) Equality of opportunity for all citizens.
- b) Critique of Hindu society based on an autonomous ideology.
- c) Establishment of a casteless society by removing oppression & domination.

5. Constitutional References on Social Justice

The constitution of India was adopted on Nov 26, 1949. Some provision of the constitution came into force on the same day, but the bulk came into force on 26th Jan 1950.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is the man of millennium for social justice since he was the first man in history to successfully lead a tirade of securing social justice to the vast societies of Indian society through the constitutional methods. Dr. Ambedkar was the man who tried to turn the wheel of the law towards social justice for all.

At the time of independence, the constitution makers were highly influenced by the feelings of social equality and social justice. For the same reasons, they incorporated such provisions in the constitution of India, these ideals like "SOCIALIST", "SECULAR", "DEMOCRATIC" AND "REPUBLIC" has been inserted in the preamble, which reflects its SOCIAL WELFARE CHARACTER.

The term "Justice" in the Preamble embraces three distinct forms. Social, economic and political secured through various provisions of fundamental rights and Directive principles. Social justice denotes the equal treatment of all citizens without any social distinction based on caste, color, race, religion, sex and so on.

Here are some provisions in our constitution which ensures civic equality. There are more prioritized and fundamental in nature.

- 1) Equality before law (Art. 14)
- 2) Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of Religion, race, caste, sex, Place of Birth. (Art. 15)
- 3) Equality of opportunity in matters of Public employment. (Art. 16)
- 4) Abolition of untouchability. (Art. 17)
- 5) Abolition of Titles. (Art. 18)

6. Social Democracy as the Means and Distributive Justice as the End

Ambedkar was of the opinion that Political democracy, or Political equality is of no use, if it is not backed by social democracy. He said, by providing equality in social sphere only then justice can be done. Ambedkar holds that the individual in society is an end in himself and he has certain inalienable right in a social relationship, which must be guaranteed to him by the consumption on certain reasonable conditions and be protected by the state.

Dr. Ambedkar laid much emphasis on the term moral and said, "The declaration of independence does not assert that all men are equal; it proclaims that they are created equal".

Equality of opportunity is a misleading term; there should be opportunity for equality. He says, "Democracy cannot function in the absence of basic civil liberties – which enables the community to vindicate itself against the state furthermore, the right to criticize, if it is to be effective, must include the right to organize opposition through political parties. He openly said that, unless minorities being treated as equal as majorities in India, Nation can't grow upto the maximum potential.

Infact, he considered the liberation of the untouchables as more urgent problems than the freedom of the country.

He also founded "Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha" (Untouchable class welfare league).

7. Ambedkar's Criticism of the Role of Congress and Gandhi

Dr. Ambedkar bitterly criticized the social system of Hindus based on four Varna's because it promotes inequality. In the course of talks with Gandhi in August 1931, he told Gandhi that the congress cared more for the strength rather than the Principles and Hindus had not shown any change of heart so far as the untouchable and the depressed classes are concerned. In the Minorities committee also he emphatically said "I would like to make this matter absolutely plain at the start, whatever may be the representative character of Mr. Gandhi or the congress people, they certainly are not in a position to bind us, certainly not".

Ambedkar bitterly criticized the role of Gandhi in the round table conference and said, "A worse person could not have been chosen to guide India's destiny. As a unifying force he was a failure..."

As per Ambedkar, there are some principles which are necessary for social Justice.

- i. Establishing a society where individual becomes the means of all social purpose.
- ii. Establishment of a society based on Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.
- iii. Establishing democracy in Political, economic and social sphere.
- iv. Establishing democracy through constitutional measures.
- v. Establishing democracy by breaking monopoly of upper strata on political power.

8. Conclusion

Without considering social democracy as MEANS, we can never dream of an END like distributive justice, and distributive justice can only be delivered in a social democracy.

For Ambedkar, social justice is based on equal rights and human dignity through legal framework. As a result of his thoughts, "Indian constitution guarantees equal right to all. Ambedkar realized that affirmative action is only way to improve the overall condition of the Dalit community with safeguards through legal institution.

Initially, he tried to seek emancipation of Dalits by bringing transformation within the structure of Hinduism. It involves his effort through opening the temples for Dalits, multi caste dinners and public donning of the sacred thread of the savarnas. However, Ambedkar came to realize soon that such an approach would not bring the desired result for the amelioration of the inhuman condition of the Dalits. He asserted that the Dalits should come forward and assert for their own cause. He gave them a Mantra. EDUCATE - ORGANISE – AGITATE . . .

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