

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 7 | Issue 6

2024

© 2024 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

This article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to submission@ijlmh.com.

Ambedkar's Democratic Vision: A Study of His Political Philosophy in Relation to Democracy

ABHEYSHEK JAMWAL¹ AND VASUDHA SHARMA²

ABSTRACT

“Democracy is a form and a method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the social life are brought about without bloodshed” – B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a well-known figure in Indian politics, had unique ideas that intersected with major political ideologies like Liberalism and Marxism. However, he also developed his own distinct perspective. He emphasized the fact that societal values and moral conduct were more significant than mere political regulations. According to Ambedkar, democracy should aim to ensure equality and freedom for all individuals. He didn't view democracy solely as a system of governance but as a framework for organizing how people interact within society. Ambedkar stressed that the standard of interpersonal interactions within the community should be reflected in the democracy. He believed that democracy should empower everyone to enjoy freedom, equality, and mutual respect. Moreover, he argued that democracy should serve both as an ideal to strive for and as a means to achieve it. This implies that democracy should not only guarantee individual liberties and equality but also foster fairness and compassion in society.

In a different way, Ambedkar believed the primary objective of democracy should be on how people interact with one another in the community, making sure that everyone is treated equally and given the right to live as they choose. In line with the principles of democracy, his philosophy emphasized the significance of social peace and justice. As a result, Ambedkar's idea of democracy includes social structure and ethics in addition to the administration of politics.

Keywords: *B.R. Ambedkar, Political ideologies, Untouchability, Social justice, Equality, Democracy, Fraternity & Government.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) played a significant role in shaping modern India as a prominent figure in nation-building. Throughout his extensive public service spanning over

¹ Author is a LL.M. Student at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab, India.

² Author is a LL.M. Student at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab, India.

three decades, he passionately believed that politics should serve as a tool to pursue justice, aiming to empower all segments of Indian society with freedom. Ambedkar truly devoted himself tirelessly to upholding the rights of the untouchables within an unjust social framework, predominantly employing political strategies. Through these ventures, he formulated his unique perspectives on Indian society and politics, shaping his vision for a more just and equitable future.

Ambedkar's political ideology was shaped by a blend of the major political traditions of his era: liberal, conservative, and radical. What sets him apart is his ability to rise above these traditions. Influenced by figures like John Dewey, an American pragmatist and his mentor, as well as the Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman, Ambedkar also drew inspiration from Edmund Burke, the British conservative thinker, although he cannot be strictly categorized as conservative. His concept of liberty shares similarities with that of T.H. Green.

Ambedkar's philosophy is elementally rooted in ethics and religion, particularly his unique exploration of Indian traditions and philosophical systems. He derived political ideas from this investigation, establishing the basis of his view of Indian society and its institutional dynamics on moral precepts. These ideas included democracy, justice, the state, and rights. Two fundamental claims form the basis of his political philosophy: Firstly, rights are safeguarded not solely by legal statutes but also by the ethical and societal awareness within a community. Secondly, a democratic government can only thrive within a democratic society. He views democracy as innately tied to a society characterized by interconnected living beings and emphasizes that social conscience is vital for the protection of all rights.

According to Ambedkar, "Democracy's roots lie in social relationships, reflecting the associated life among individuals forming a society"³.

Essentially, Ambedkar represents the principles and implementation of social democracy. His notable impact on political philosophy comes from merging freedom, fairness, and unity with the idea of social democracy, which he links to democracy as a form of government.

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar's Opinion on Democracy

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is universally recognized as a strong advocate for democracy, both in his convictions and his actions. While numerous scholars have offered diverse definitions and interpretations of democracy, it is perceptible that democracy extends beyond being merely a governmental structure; rather, it incorporates a lifestyle and set of values.

³ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, volume 17 (3) p. 519

Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy is widely embraced: "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

According to Prof Walter Bagehot, democracy can be described as "government by discussion."

Ambedkar offers a more tangible definition of democracy, stating that "Democracy is a form and a method of government through which revolutionary changes in the economic and social aspects of people's lives are achieved without resorting to violence."⁴

Dr. Ambedkar elaborates on democracy, describing it as "a mode of associated living." He suggests that the foundation of democracy lies in social relationships, particularly in the interconnectedness of individuals within society".⁵

Ambedkar emphasized that democracy demands for significant transformations in both the social and economic realms, advocating for the peaceful acceptance of these changes by society without resorting to conflict or violence. He aimed to establish the principle of equality in all aspects of life, not just politically, but also socially and economically. Unlike many others who focus solely on political and institutional aspects, Ambedkar prioritized social democracy over political democracy. He advocated for fostering social cohesion among individuals instead of solely depending on the division of authority and legal protections. At the core of his philosophy was the concept that social influence directly impacts political authority. Ambedkar deeply recognized the social and economic gaps that weaken the shared awareness of the Indian populace. He emphasized the need to merge political democracy with social democracy and asserted that political democracy alone cannot survive without a foundation of social democracy.

Ambedkar dedicated considerable attention to religious concepts that uphold democracy. He recognized that the religious basis of the caste system are primary hurdle to democracy in India, while also recognizing the Buddhist principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity as democratic foundations. Approaching democracy pragmatically, Ambedkar aligned with the realistic school of political thought, prioritizing practical application over theoretical principles. His vision for democracy centered on a government that truly represented the people's interests. For Ambedkar, democracy meant the eradication of slavery, caste divisions, and coercion. He advocated for free thinking, individual choice, and the ability to coexist peacefully—a path he believed aligned with democratic ideals. Ambedkar emphasized that democracy is rooted in social relationships, reflecting the interconnected lives of the people within society.

⁴ "Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches," vol. 17, no. 3, p. 475.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 519

Ambedkar firmly believed that providing education to the marginalized segments of Indian society, who are motivated to demolish the caste system, will ultimately lead to the abolition of caste-based discrimination. By empowering these individuals through education, democracy in India can be safeguarded and entrusted into more secure hands⁶.

II. PARLIAMENTARY/REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

According to Dr. Ambedkar, “parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular Government, a government of the people, by the people and for the people”. “In parliamentary democracy, there is the Legislature to express the voice of the people; there is the Executive which is subordinate to the Legislature and bound to obey the Legislature. Over and above the Legislature and the Executive there is the Judiciary to control both and keep them both within prescribed bounds”⁷.

B.R. Ambedkar contends that democratic system with a parliament has evolved along three pivotal axis. Initially, it commenced with the establishment of political equality through the expansion of equal suffrage. Subsequently, it has embraced the notion of providing equal opportunities in social and economic spheres. Lastly, it acknowledges the necessity of restraining entities that oppose the societal good from exerting undue influence over the state.

Parliamentary democracy is deemed to give the most favorable outcomes in the long term as it emphasizes virtues such as competence, cooperation, mutual respect, self-reliance, discipline, and dedication to work, all aimed at the well-being of the populace. Ambedkar underscores the significance of parliamentary democracy as a system that balances both change and continuity, a principle he holds in high regard. He believes that the effective functioning of parliamentary democracy hinges on the spirit and engagement of the people, highlighting the intrinsic link between people and democracy. Ambedkar equates democracy with equality, emphasizing its role in rectifying economic injustices faced by the marginalized sections of society. Consequently, parliamentary democracy emerges as a champion of liberty, continually striving to address the economic grievances of the underprivileged and disenfranchised.

Ambedkar argues that the foundational error underlying parliamentary democracy lies in the failure to recognize that political democracy cannot thrive without social and economic democracy. He points to the swift collapse of parliamentary democracy in countries like Italy, Germany, and Russia, contrasting it with its resilience in England and the United States. He attributes this difference to the presence of a higher degree of economic and social democracy

⁶ Ibid, p. 523

⁷ “Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches,” vol. 10, pp. 106-107.

in the latter nations. According to Ambedkar, social and economic democracy form the substratum of political democracy, analogous to the strength of a body being determined by the robustness of its tissues and fibers. He asserts that democracy is synonymous with equality, yet parliamentary democracy has predominantly championed liberty while neglecting equality. This imbalance has led to a proliferation of inequalities, as liberty has overshadowed and marginalized the principle of equality.

Ambedkar stresses that true equality in socio-economic, political, and religious rights for everyone, regardless of gender, can only be ensured through a democratic government. He highlights that his main life goal was to create a real social democracy.

(A) Political Democracy

According to Dr. Ambedkar, political democracy is based on four fundamental principles:

- 1) Every person has intrinsic value and should be respected as such.
- 2) Each individual has inherent rights that must be protected by the Constitution.
- 3) No one should be forced to give up their constitutional rights in exchange for privileges.
- 4) The government should not delegate authority to private individuals to govern others.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that the main goal of a democratic government should be ensuring the well-being and respect of every individual. He emphasized that political freedom, social advancement, and human rights are crucial protections enshrined in the constitution, forming the fundamental principles of a fair democracy. Ambedkar emphasizes that the foundation of political democracy lies in the social structure of a community. Therefore, political democracy and liberty are insufficient without being supported by equitable social frameworks, as the political system is inherently intertwined with the social structure. He highlights the profound influence of social structures on political systems, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of social relations before implementing any political or economic reforms. In essence, democracy should be viewed as both a social and political approach to governance.

Dr. Ambedkar's assertion underscores the foundational principle of equality within democracy. The concept of "one man, one value" emphasizes that every person, irrespective of their background or social status, holds intrinsic value and is entitled to equal consideration and opportunities in both political and social spheres. This principle extends beyond the realm of politics and encompasses broader societal dynamics, including economic prosperity.

Ambedkar believed that for democracy to truly fulfill its purpose, it must ensure the economic well-being of all citizens. Economic prosperity plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of

life and empowering individuals to participate fully in the democratic process. Without addressing economic disparities and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, democracy risks becoming superficial and ineffective in meeting the diverse needs and aspirations of its citizens.

In essence, according to Ambedkar, democracy encompasses not only political arrangements such as voting rights and governance structures but also encompasses socio-economic equality. True democracy is achieved when all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive economically, thus enabling them to fully realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

Conditions necessary for the effective functioning of modern democracy include:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar emphasized several key requirements necessary for the successful functioning of democracy. In summary, these conditions include:

1. Society should be devoid of any noticeable disparities or inequalities. – He says, “there must not be an oppressed and suppressed class. There must not be a class which has got all the privileges and a class which has got all the burdens to carry. Such a thing, such a division, such an organization of a society has within itself the germs of a bloody revolution, and perhaps it would be impossible for the democracy to cure them”.⁸

2. According to Ambedkar, a vital aspect of democracy is the presence of opposition. He contends that democracy necessitates a system where power is checked. Beyond the periodic electoral check every five years, there must also be an immediate check. This immediate check is facilitated by having an opposition in parliament capable of challenging the government.⁹

3. Equality under the law and in governance - Dr. Ambedkar emphasizes the importance of not only equality before the law but also equality of treatment in administration. He underscores the need for a responsive, responsible, and impartial administration that is determined to serve the best interests of the country. He advocates for a government where those in power prioritize the welfare of the nation and are unafraid to reform social and economic norms to align with principles of justice and expediency.¹⁰

4. Constitutional Ethics & Morality - Dr. Ambedkar highlighted that while a Constitution may provide the legal framework, it is merely the skeleton. The essence of the Constitution, he

⁸ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar *Writings and Speeches*, volume 17 (3) p. 475-476

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 477

¹⁰ Das, Bhagwan, Editor. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*. Bheem Patrika, vol. 1, Jullundhar, 1977, p. 22.

believed, lies in what he termed as constitutional morality¹¹. Dr. Ambedkar stressed that while the Constitution is vital for the success of democracy, what is even more crucial is the adherence to constitutional morality within both the political system and society at large.

5. Avoidance of the dominance or Oppression by the majority – Dr. Ambedkar says, “there is one other thing which is very necessary in the working of Democracy, and it is this that in the name of democracy there must be no tyranny of the majority over the minority. The minority must always feel safe that although the majority is carrying on the Government, the minority is not being hurt, or the minority is not being hit below the belt”¹²

6. Moral framework - Dr. Ambedkar expressed that a politician not only engages in politics but also embodies a particular ideology encompassing both the practical methods and underlying philosophy of politics. He likened the state of politics to an unpleasant sewage system, highlighting its unhygienic and unsatisfactory nature. Despite this, Ambedkar believed that politics holds the key to liberation for all marginalized groups. He urged the oppressed classes to seize political power as a means to achieve true social democracy. Emphasizing the importance of moral integrity in politics, he aimed to ensure that democracy could be realized in its genuine form.

7. Collective moral awareness or Societal consciousness - As per Ambedkar Societal Conscience means, “Conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer; and it means that everybody whether he suffers that particular wrong or not is prepared to join him in order to get him relieved.” Dr. Ambedkar regarded societal conscience as a critical factor for the effective functioning of democracy. He believed that without societal conscience, democracy would inevitably fail to succeed. Ambedkar emphasized that a healthy democratic environment is shaped by the collective will of the people.

Dr. Ambedkar strongly advocated for the realization of social democracy in India. He emphasized that political democracy cannot thrive unless it is built upon the foundation of social democracy. Ambedkar cautioned the nation about the inherent contradictions in adopting political equality while simultaneously perpetuating social and economic inequalities. He urged for introspection, questioning how long India could sustain this contradiction. He warned that persisting with such disparities would jeopardize the integrity of political democracy. Dr. Ambedkar stressed the urgency of resolving this contradiction as soon as possible. He warned that if the inequalities persisted, those who were oppressed would eventually dismantle the

¹¹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar *Writings and Speeches*, volume 17 (3) p. 480

¹² *Ibid*, p. 482

political democracy painstakingly constructed by the Assembly. Ambedkar believed that for progress towards state socialism, political democracy must evolve into social democracy, thereby addressing the root causes of inequality.

III. CONCLUSION

Dr. Ambedkar held a steadfast belief in democracy, viewing it as pivotal in his vision of a society free from exploitation. His conception of democracy emphasized the principles of "one person, one vote" and "one vote, one value," highlighting the importance of individual empowerment and participation in decision-making processes. For Ambedkar, democracy embodied ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, prioritizing the interests of the people above all else. He critiqued parliamentary democracy as a system where people vote for their rulers, advocating for a more grassroots-oriented approach. Ambedkar challenged conventional notions of equality, recognizing that they often failed to address the needs of marginalized groups. He proposed a radical shift towards total eradication of inequality, championing the principle of affirmative action to ensure equal opportunities for all.

B.R. Ambedkar firmly believed that for political democracy to truly thrive, it must be accompanied social & economic equality. This highlights his deep understanding of democracy in all its aspects. He believed that merely granting political rights, such as the right to vote, was insufficient to ensure true democracy. Instead, he argued that democracy should be viewed as a means to achieve broader goals of social and economic justice.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, the ultimate object of democracy is not just to establish a system of governance but to create a society where every individual enjoys equal rights and opportunities. He recognized that social and economic inequalities often obstructed individuals from fully participating in the democratic process and accessing their rights. Therefore, he advocated for the simultaneous pursuit of democracy in both social and economic spheres alongside political democracy. Ambedkar's radical ideas stemmed from his vision of a society free from exploitation and discrimination. He believed that the true greatness of a democracy lies in its ability to address the root causes of inequality and oppression. His enduring relevance to Indian society today lies in the principles he championed, such as social justice, equality, and freedom from caste-based discrimination.

Central to Ambedkar's political philosophy was the concept of democratic socialism, which emphasizes the equitable allocation of wealth & resources to ensure the well-being of all citizens. He viewed constitutionalism as the means to regulate these principles and safeguard the rights of individuals against discrimination and oppression.

In summary, Ambedkar's legacy lies in his steadfast commitment to create a society grounded on principles of social and economic democracy, where every individual enjoys dignity, equality, and freedom. His ideas continue to inspire movements for social justice and equality in contemporary Indian society.
