

Parliamentary Democracy in India and Vision of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

Paper Submission: 04/06/2021, Date of Acceptance: 13/06/2021, Date of Publication: 25/06/2021

Abstract

The Indian constitution has been a finest model for the developing countries as we enter in the century. It is largely due to pioneering vision of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, founder and chief architect of the constitution of India. According to Dr. Ambedkar the most accepted form of government of the world is democracy. Democracy is unrealizable without freedom of political discussion. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar stressed parliamentary democracy along with socialism an architect of the Indian constitution he provided suitable parliamentary form of government to the country He said that "Parliamentary system of government is much more than government by discussion. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that there are four premises upon which political democracy rests: (1) the individual is an end in him (2) The individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution. (3) The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his Constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege and. (4) The state shall not delegate power to private persons to govern others. Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged. We are left with a half-baked democracy, where reasonably sound democratic institutions coexist with social conditions that threaten to make parliamentary democracy "a name and a farce". Presently, if we have a sound parliamentary democracy it is only due to intellectual vision of Dr B. R. Ambedkar. This paper seeks to examine Ambedkar's vision for Parliamentary democracy and there conceptualization in the Constitution of India.

Keywords: Constitution, Democracy, Parliament, Justice, Equality.

Introduction

There are various forms of government known to history- Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy to which may be added Dictatorship. But the most prevalent form of Government at the present time is 'Democracy'. In the West, the Greeks claim to have invented the Democracy. An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there should be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.¹ To understand Ambedkar's views on electoral democracy and party system, it is important to understand his views on democracy. Ambedkar viewed democracy, i.e. self government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as a form of government that should go beyond simple constitutional morality. He believed that the maintenance of a constitutional form of government is not the same thing as self-government by the people. He also felt that granting adult suffrage was an essential condition for the formation of a government of the people in the logical sense of the phrase. But it cannot by itself be said to bring about a democratic government, in the sense of the government by the people and for the people. According to Ambedkar, there are some fundamental concerns that are important to understand democracy, ignoring which would lead democracy to peril.

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Aim of the study

1. To know the basic concept of democracy; Ambedkar's view on democracy; Ambedkar's idea of electoral democracy and political representation; and Ambedkar's view of the party system.
2. The main aim of this research paper is to critically analyze the idea of Parliamentary democracy in the view of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.
3. To analyze the idea of democracy of Ambedkar in details, it can be found out that Ambedkar had unshakeable faith in Parliamentary democracy.

Prevalent Connotation of Democracy

Democracy is the most valued and also the indistinct political terms in the modern world. The ancient Greek word 'democracy' means rule by the demos, which can be translated as either 'the people; or 'the mole' depending on one's ideological preference. By itself, democracy means little more than that, in some undefined sense, political power is ultimately in the hands of the whole adult population and that no smaller group has the right to rule. Democracy can only take on a more useful meaning when qualified by one of the other word with which it is associated, for example, liberal democracy, representative democracy, participatory democracy or direct democracy. Although all free societies are democratic, democracies can fail to protect individual freedom. Countries are generally considered democratic to the extent that they have fair and frequent elections in which nearly all adults have the right to vote, citizens have the right to vote, citizens have the right to form and join organizations and to express themselves in alternative sources of information existed. Architects of democracy must determine the constitutional structure that best suits the needs of a particular country, alternative forms of constitutional democracy include parliamentary versus presidential forms of government, plurality versus proportional representation system and federal versus unitary systems.²

Dr. Ambedkar firmly believed that our political democracy must stand on the base of social democracy which means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. He emphasized on measuring the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved. According to him if we want to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, we must hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. He advocated that in our political, social and economic life, we must have the principle of one man, one vote and one value.³ Dr. Ambedkar realized that the democracy in India was a product of the historical situation and a unique national experience. The course of democratic development must protect the values of individual liberty, fraternal relationship, and morality grounded in humanistic religious belief. He supported the ideas of Constitutional separation of

religion and state, the provision of fundamental rights, and the assignment of important functions to the Judiciary for strengthening the roots of democracy in India. Thus he elaborates:⁴

Would the principle of democracy suit the people of India? My honorable friend the Prime Minister has not enlightened us by enunciating what he regards as the principles of democracy. But I take of that what he means by democracy is majority rule, because unless we all accept majority rule as the fundamental working principle, there can be no political democracy. Obviously that is the root that is the basis that is the line from which we must proceed to discuss this question.

Whether the Democratic form of Government will result in good will depend upon the disposition of the individuals composing society. If the mental disposition of the individuals is democratic then the democratic form of Government can be expected to result in good Government. If not, democratic form of Government may easily become a dangerous form of Government.⁵

Parliamentary Democracy

The successful working of a Parliamentary Government assumes the existence of certain conditions. It is only when these conditions evolved that Parliamentary Government can take roots. One such condition was pointed out by the late Lord Balfour when in 1925 he had an occasion to discuss the political future of the Arab peoples in conversation with his niece Blanche Dugdale. In the course of this conversation he said:⁶

It is partly the fault of the British nation—and of the Americans; we can't exonerate them from blame either—that this idea of 'representative government' has got into the heads of nations who haven't the smallest notion of what its basis must be. It's difficult to explain, and the Anglo Saxon races are bad at exposition. Moreover we know it so well ourselves that it does not strike us as necessary to explain it. I doubt if you would find it written in any book on the British Constitution that the whole essence of British Parliamentary Government lies in the intention to make the thing work. We take that for granted. We have spent hundreds of years in elaborating a system that rest on that alone. It is so deep in us that we have lost sight of it. But it is not so obvious to others. These peoples — Indians,

Egyptians, and so on — study our learning. They read our history, our philosophy, and politics. They learn about our parliamentary methods of obstruction, but nobody explains to them that when it comes to the point, all our parliamentary parties are determined that the machinery shan't stop. 'The king's government must go on' as the Duke of Wellington said. But their idea is that the function of opposition is to stop the machine.

Ambedkar's Vision on Parliamentary Democratic System

The draft constitution was introduced in the constituent assembly on November 4, 1948 by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar gave speech with reference of Indian society and deep understanding of the psychology of Indian people. He compared the democratic system of the presidential type of America and the parliamentary type of England. In the Draft constitution of India Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar suggested parliamentary system of constitution with nominal head of the state as president. Supporting the historical evidence of the past, Dr. Ambedkar, viewed that ancient India was the master of the World. There was such intellectual freedom in Ancient India as was nowhere else to be found. There was a time when India was studded within Republics and where there were Monarchies, they were either elected or limited. But they were not absolute. Parliamentary democracy is unknown to us at present. But India, at one time had Parliamentary institutions. If one go through the 'Suktas' of Mahaprinibbana, one can find ample evidence of democratic method in Buddhism. The Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas were nothing but Parliament and the Sanghas knew and observed all the rules of Parliamentary procedures known to modern times. It is stated that the system of secret ballot paper was followed in the Buddhist Sanghas. The ballot paper is called, 'Salapatraka Grahakas'. Unfortunately, we have lost all this past heritages.⁷ Addressing to the Constituent Assembly, he said:⁸

It is not that India did not know Parliaments or Parliamentary procedures. The Buddhist Sangha had rules of seat arrangements, rules regarding motions, voting by ballot, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Censure motion, counting of votes, committees, regularization, adjudication and other things related to Parliamentary institutions. Although these rules of Parliamentary procedures were applied by Buddha to the meetings of the Bhikkhu Sanghas, the essence of Buddhism lies in working practically for one's freedom- economic, social and

political. Buddha was the torchbearer of democracy and an ardent exponent of liberty, equality and fraternity.

To Ambedkar Parliamentary system of government is much more than Government by discussion. There are two pillars on which the Parliamentary system of government rests. These are the fulcrums on which the mechanism works. These two pillars are (a) an opposition and (b) free and fair elections. For the last twenty or thirty years we acclimatized to one single political party. We have nearly forgotten the necessity and importance of 'opposition' for fair working of Parliamentary Democracy. We are continuously told that opposition is an evil. Here again we are forgetting what the past history has to teach us. Moreover, one important thing in the Parliamentary Democracy is that people should know the other side, if there are two sides to a question. Hence a functional opposition is required because opposition is the key to a free political life. No democracy can do without it. Britain and Canada, the two exponents of Parliamentary systems of governments recognize this important fact and in both countries the leader of the opposition is paid salary by the Government.⁹

Dr. Ambedkar being a liberal, stressed parliamentary democracy along with state socialism many factors like impact of the west, rule of law, equality of citizens, political participation in law making and policy decisions encouraged him to accept parliamentary democracy. Ambedkar provided suitable parliamentary government to India. Ambedkar was a liberal democrat. He wanted to have the idea of elected parliamentary government but to him political stability and law and order were more important than any other matter Ambedkar favored the idea of a federal system but it should be designed in such a way that it could be converted into a powerful unitary state without too much difficulty.¹⁰ Upholding values of Parliamentary Democracy Dr. Ambedkar addressed in the Constituent Assembly:¹¹

The condemnation of the Constitution largely comes from two quarters, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Why do they condemn the Constitution? Is it because it is really a bad Constitution? I venture to say no'. The Communist Party want a Constitution based upon the principle of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They condemn the Constitution because it is based upon parliamentary democracy. The Socialists want two things. The first thing they want is that if they come in power, the Constitution must give them the freedom to nationalize or socialize all private property without payment of compensation. The

second thing that the Socialists want is that the Fundamental Rights mentioned in the Constitution must be absolute and without any limitations so that if their Party fails to come into power, they would have the unfettered freedom not merely to criticize, but also to overthrow the State.

In the Draft Constitution the Fundamental Rights are followed by what are called "Directive Principles". It is a novel feature in a Constitution framed for Parliamentary Democracy.¹² One of the reasons why Dr. Ambedkar might have vouched for parliamentary democracy is due to fact that of all the alternative systems available to establish political democracy along with social and economic democracy, parliamentary system was best poised to achieve this objective. Dr. Ambedkar, in his theory of socialism, makes it clear why the need to advocate a system of parliamentary democracy based on state socialism. This idea is discussed in the successive section of the assignment.¹³

Future of Parliamentary Democracy in India

Parliamentary Democracy is a form of Government in which the function of the people has come to be to vote for their masters and leave them to rule. Such a scheme of Government, in the opinion of Labour, is a travesty of Government by the people. Labour wants Government which is Government by the people in name as well as in fact. Secondly, liberty as conceived by Labour includes the right to equal opportunity and the duty of the State to provide the fullest facilities for growth to every individual according to his needs.¹⁴

According to 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 executive who is subordinate to the limitative and bound to obey the legislative. The Judiciary can control both the executive and legislative and keep them both within prescribed bounds. Ambedkar says-¹⁵

Parliamentary democracy has not been at a standstill. It was progressed in three directions. It began with equality of political rights by expanding in the form of equal suffrage. Secondly, it has recognized the principle of equality of social and economic opportunities. Thirdly, it has recognized that the state cannot be held at bay by corporation which is anti-social in their purpose. Parliamentary democracy produces the best result in the long run, because it assigns great significance to virtues like ability and cooperation, mutual respect

and self help, discipline and devotion to work, for the happiness of the millions of people. The system of parliamentary democracy, thus, embodies the principle of change and continuity to which Ambedkar attaches great importance. To him, only the spirit of the people can help parliamentary democracy to function well. People and democracy are closely related to each other. Ambedkar says, democracy is another name for equality. It is, therefore, a matter of some surprise that there has been a revolt against parliamentary democracy although not even a century has elapsed since its universal acceptance and inauguration.

While addressing to the Sholapur Municipality Conference he expressed his view on the working of Parliamentary Democracy in India and the political situation that has grown up in the country has developed the habit among the people to pay homage to one political party, the Congress. Observing the present-day democratic situation in India, he said:¹⁶

I am no believer in democracy as an ideal to be pursued in all circumstances and in all claims; and having regard to the present-day situation in India, democracy is a most unsuitable system of government. At any rate, for some time in India needs the strongest hand of an enlightened autocrat.

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Conclusion

The Constitution makers adopted the British model of parliamentary democracy but democratic institutions had existed in many parts of ancient Vedic India. In this historical context, we explore the concepts of 'Sabha' and 'Samiti', the ancient institutions of representative democracy in India. Under the Constitution, the people of India exercise their sovereignty through Parliament at the central level and through State Legislatures in each State. The executive power is vested in the President, who is the highest dignitary in the realm, the symbol of the statehood, and the embodiment of the unity of the country. He represents the sovereign will of the nation and exercises his functions by acting on the advice and aid of the Council of Ministers. Different cases have been discussed regarding the judicial approach to parliamentary democracy, the concept of

independence of the judiciary, and its power to amend the Constitution. After discussing the the parliamentary privileges and freedom of speech in Parliament, the author casts more light on the concepts of election and adult suffrage in India, and focuses on the role and position of the Speaker/Chairman in the House of People and respective State Legislatures. In the end, the author identifies specific problems observed in practice and discusses the challenges facing the Indian parliamentary democracy.

As discussed earlier, Dr. Ambedkar had a visionary conception of democracy, which needs to be "rediscovered" today. But going beyond that, we must also enlarge this vision in the light of recent developments. While Dr. Ambedkar was far ahead of his time in stressing the link between political and economic democracy, perhaps he failed to anticipate the full possibilities of political democracy itself. He thought that in the absence of economic democracy, ordinary people would be powerless. Also, he thought of political democracy mainly in terms of electoral and parliamentary processes. In both respects, his assessment was highly relevant at that time. Today, however, we are constantly discovering new forms of democratic practice, in which people are often able to participate even if economic democracy is nowhere near being realized.

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