

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

**DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S PHILOSOPHICAL VISION OF
DEMOCRACY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

Aman Kumar Tiwari

Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the foremost architects of modern India, stands as a profound philosopher, jurist, and social reformer whose intellectual legacy continues to shape the discourse on democracy, equality, and justice. His understanding of democracy went far beyond its conventional political definition. For Ambedkar, democracy was not merely a form of government or a political arrangement, but a comprehensive philosophy of life based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. He believed that democracy must penetrate into the very texture of social life, guiding not only institutions but also interpersonal relations and collective moral consciousness.

Ambedkar's philosophical vision of democracy arose from his deep concern with the oppressive social hierarchies of caste and class that had historically denied dignity and equality to millions in India. He held that political democracy, characterized by the principle of "one man, one vote, and one value," would remain fragile and meaningless unless supported by social and economic democracy. Thus, his concept of democracy was rooted in the moral and ethical transformation of society—what he often called "a mode of associated living."

Ambedkar's thought reflects both realism and idealism. As a realist, he acknowledged the limitations of political systems and the dangers of inequality; as an idealist, he envisioned a democratic society governed by reason, justice, and compassion. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist ethics and Enlightenment rationalism, he emphasized that democracy must be sustained by constitutional morality, public conscience, and social justice. In his view, the vitality of Indian democracy depended on the moral commitment of its citizens to uphold equality and human dignity.

This study seeks to analyze Dr. Ambedkar's philosophical conception of democracy—its ethical foundations, social implications, and political dimensions. It aims to explore how Ambedkar redefined democracy as both a political mechanism and a moral

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

ideal, advocating the transformation of political democracy into social democracy. By doing so, he offered a vision of democracy that remains not only relevant but also essential for the realization of a just and humane society in contemporary India.

Ambedkar on Democracy:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is known as a staunch protagonist of Democracy in his belief and action. Many thinkers have given many definitions and meanings of democracy. But the fact is Democracy is not merely a form of Government but it is a way of life.

The most popular definition of Democracy is given by Abraham Lincoln as, “*Democracy as Government of the people by the people and for the people.*”¹ According to Walter Bagehot Democracy is a, “*Government by discussion.*”² Ambedkar defines democracy in a much more concrete way. He says, “*Democracy is a form and a method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed.*”³

Dr. Ambedkar further defined Democracy as, “*Democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of associated life between the people who form the society.*”⁴

According to Ambedkar, democracy means fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the acceptance of those changes by the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed. He wanted to establish the principle of one man, one vote and one value not only in the political life of India but also in social and economic life. 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. The concept of power contained in his thinking has a direct relationship between social power and political power. He was conscious of the social and economic inequalities which corrode the national consciousness of the Indian people. Ambedkar said, “We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the lease of it social democracy”.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

Ambedkar paid serious attention to religious notions that promote democracy. Ambedkar viewed the religious foundation of caste as the fundamental obstacle to democracy in India on the one hand and the Buddhist doctrine of liberally, equality and fraternity as the foundations for democracy on the other hand. Ambedkar thinks of democracy from the viewpoint of practical life. He belongs to the realistic school of political scientists. He is not bothered about the principles and theories of political science. He aspired for having a government of the people, for the people and by the people. According to Ambedkar, democracy means no slavery, no caste, no coercion. He wants free thoughts that choice and capacity to live and let live, which his conscience, would be the right path to democracy. Ambedkar says “Democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in terms of the associated life between the people who form the society”. If you give education to the lower strata of the Indian society which is interested in blowing up the caste systems, the caste system will be blown up”.⁵Giving education to those who want to blow up caste system will improve prospect of democracy in India and put democracy in safer hands.

B.R. Ambedkar think Democracy View:

Vaisha and Shudra are hierarchical divisions of high and low caste, based on birth, and act accordingly”. B.R. Ambedkar thinks of democracy from the viewpoint of practical life. He belongs to the realistic school of political scientists. He is not bothered about the principles and theories of political science. During the national improvement, his aim is to have justice and freedom for the people in the real sense. He aspired to have a government of the people, for the people, and by the people. According to B.R. Ambedkar, democracy means no slavery, no caste, and no coercion. He wants free thoughts that choose and capacity to live and let live, which his conscience would be the right path to democracy. B.R. Ambedkar says, “Democracy is a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in social relationships, in terms of the associated life between the people who form the society”. B.R. Ambedkar is the greatest political thinker. Outwardly this may seem strange that in India, life was the monopoly of the Brahmin caste and was completely denied to other castes for thousands of years.⁶ However, here no contradiction is involved. It was the very privileged position assigned to the Brahmin that became the cause of the

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

retardation. In Indian society, property, illiteracy, caste distinctions as the positive dangers to democracy. In these situations, educational facilities and economic help should be provided for those who are illiterate and backward on one hand and on the other, who want to wipe on the roots of caste system in order to safeguard the interest of democracy. B.R. Ambedkar says, “If you give education to the lower strata of the Indian society which is interested in blowing up the caste systems, the caste system will be blown up”. At the moment, the indiscriminate help given to education by the Indian. Caste system will improve prospect of democracy in India and put democracy in safer hands. In Indian society, class structure is a positive danger to democracy. This class structure made a distinction of rich and poor, high and low, owners and workers, and permanent and sacrosanct parts of social organization. “Practically speaking in a class structure there is, on the other hand, tyranny, vanity pride, arrogance, greed, selfishness and on the other, insecurity, poverty, and degradation, loss of liberty, self-reliance, independence, dignity and self-respect.

Parliamentary Democracy:

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 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

Ambedkar says, “Parliamentary democracy has not been at a standstill. It was progressed in three directions. *Firstly*, 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”.⁸ 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

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

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. The result is the parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs of the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class.

Ambedkar says, “the wrong ideology which has initiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy. Some way questions this proposition. To those who are disposed to question it, I will ask a counter-question. Why did parliamentary democracy collapse so easily in Italy, Germany, and Russia? Why did it not collapse so easily in England and the U.S.A? To any mind, there is only one answer – namely, there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than it existed in the former. Social and Economic democracy are the tissues and the fiber of a political democracy. The tougher the tissue and fiber, the greater the strength of the body. Democracy is another name for equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavor to strike a balance between liberty and equality, which the result that liberty swallowed equality and has left a progeny of inequalities”.⁹

He says, under the democratic system of government only we could ensure equally socio-economic, political and religious freedom to every man and woman. Ambedkar’s ultimate aim of life was to create a “real social democracy”.

Political Democracy:

According to Ambedkar, political democracy rests on four premises. They are:

1. “The individual is an end in himself.
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.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

4. The state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.”¹⁰

All these points are absolutely important in Democracy. Thus according to Dr. Ambedkar, the main objective of Democratic Government should be the welfare of individuals. The dignity of the individual, political liberty, social progress and human rights are necessary constitutional safeguards which form Ambedkar’s basic decent democratic ideals in the political democracy. To him, the ground plan means the social structure of a community to which the political plan is sought to be applied. Political democracy and liberty are nothing if not beaked and bucked up by equal social patterns, because the political structure rests on the social structure. “Indeed, the social structure,” he says, “has a profound effect on the political structure. It may modify it in its working. It may nullify it or it may even make a cherry of it.” It is therefore, essential that before passing any Judgment on any scheme of political relationship even making plans for economic reforms, the people must consider the ground plan that means social relations; Democracy should be regarded as both a social and a political method.

“The soul of Democracy”, he says, “is the doctrine of one man, one value”. This principle finds intrinsic worth in the individual personality of each man in political and social relation. This stands for the economic well-being of the people, without which democracy, to him, has no value.” The sum of democracy, according to him, essentially consists in the economic welfare of all men living in a particular society, besides its realization in political relation. Otherwise, democracy would kill its own soul and democracy without soul would be useless, unrelated to human aspirations.

B.R. Ambedkar’s idea of Democracy in the Indian context:

According to B.R. Ambedkar, democracy means fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the acceptance of those changes by the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed.¹⁰ He wanted to establish the principle of one man, one vote and one value not only in the political life of India but also in social and economic life. 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. B.R. Ambedkar paid greater attention to social linkage among people than separation of powers

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

and constitutional safeguards for democracy. and political power. He was conscious of the social and economic inequalities which corrode the national consciousness of the Indian people.¹¹ B.R. Ambedkar said, “We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the lease of it social democracy”. B.R. Ambedkar paid. serious attention to religious notions that promote democracy.¹² B.R. Ambedkar viewed the religious foundation of caste as the fundamental obstacle to democracy in India on the one hand and the Buddhist doctrine of liberally, equality and fraternity as the foundations for democracy on the other hand. He writes, “It is common experience that certain names become associated with certain notions and sentiments, which determine a person’s attitude toward men and things.”¹³

Conditions precedent for the successful working of modern Democracy:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had very explicitly stated the conditions which are very much necessary for the successful working of democracy. They can be stated in brief as under.

1. *There must be no glaring inequalities in the society.* 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”.¹⁴
2. *The existence of Opposition* – For Ambedkar, “Democracy means a veto of power. Democracy requires that not only that the Government should be subject to the veto, long term veto of five years, at the hands of the people, but there must be an immediate veto. For this, there must be an Opposition in the Parliament to challenge the Government”.¹⁵
3. *Equality in law and administration* - There must be not only equality before Law, but there must be equality of treatment in administration.

The administration must be well responsive, responsible, and impartial; and it must be well determined. It should command obedience to authority, “We must have a Government,” he said,” in which the men in power will give their undivided allegiance to the best interest of the country. We must have a government in which men in power,

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for.”¹⁶

1. *Constitutional Morality* - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said that, “A Constitution which contains legal provisions, is only skeleton. The flesh of the skeleton is to be found in what we call constitutional morality.”¹⁷ According to Dr. Ambedkar Constitution is important for success of democracy but more important was constitutional morality in polity and society.
2. *No Tyranny of majority* – 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”.
3. *Moral order* - Dr. Ambedkar said, “A politician does not merely trade in politics, but he also represents a particular faith covering both the method as well as the metaphysics of politics.” He further said that, Politics has become a kind of sewage system intolerably, Unsavory and insanitary. To become a politician is like going to work in a drain. According to Dr. Ambedkar Politics is the key of all emancipation. Therefore, he asked depressed classes to capture political power. For realization of Social democracy in true spirit, he emphasized for moral order in Politics just because he wanted Democracy to be implemented in true sense.
4. *Public Conscience* - According to Dr. Ambedkar Public 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 considered the condition but public conscience as essential condition for successful working of democracy because without public conscience democracy cannot be successful. It is the will of the people that makes healthy democratic atmosphere.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted Social democracy to cherish in India. He said very categorically Political Democracy cannot be successful unless there lies at the base of it of Social

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

democracy. He warned the nation in this direction that, on the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into the life of contradictions. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man, one vote and one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason if our social and economic structure continues 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 this Assembly has so laboriously built up. Dr. Ambedkar believed that political Democracy must change its form to social Democracy to develop state socialism.

Conclusion:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophical vision of democracy represents one of the most profound and transformative contributions to modern political thought in India. For Ambedkar, democracy was not merely a political arrangement or an institutional mechanism; it was a moral, social, and spiritual ideal rooted in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. His concept of democracy sought to harmonize the political with the social and economic dimensions of human life, emphasizing that true democracy cannot flourish in a society crippled by caste hierarchy, poverty, and discrimination.

Ambedkar's insistence that "political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy" remains a timeless reminder of the need to align constitutional ideals with social realities. His democratic philosophy thus goes beyond the ballot box to embrace justice, human dignity, and equal opportunity for all. He envisioned democracy as a "mode of associated living," where citizens coexist in mutual respect, guided by constitutional morality and public conscience.

The conditions he laid out for the success of democracy—the absence of glaring inequalities, the presence of a strong opposition, equality in law and administration, constitutional morality, and the protection of minorities—remain a crucial benchmark for evaluating the health of contemporary Indian polity. His prophetic warning about the "life

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

of contradictions" continues to resonate, reminding the nation that political equality cannot long endure alongside social and economic degradation.

In contemporary India, where challenges such as caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, religious intolerance, and social exclusion persist, Ambedkar's ideas continue to hold extraordinary relevance. His call for constitutional morality, moral order in politics, and the eradication of social inequalities provides not only a philosophical framework but also a moral compass for sustaining democracy in its truest sense.

Ultimately, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contribution is not merely that of an architect of a constitution but of a moral guide who provided a philosophical blueprint for a just and humane society. His vision challenges India to perpetually strive towards a deeper, more substantive democracy where justice, dignity, and fraternity are not just abstract ideals enshrined in a legal text but a lived reality for every single citizen. His thought remains an indispensable resource for navigating the complexities of modern India and for continuing the unfinished task of building a truly social democracy.

References:

- ¹ Kshirsagar Ramchandra Kamaji, Political thought of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992, p.53.
- ² Ibid, p. 53
- ³ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, volume 17 (3) p. 475
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 519
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 523
- ⁶ B.R.Ambedkar: What Congress and Gandhi Had done to the Untouchables?, p. 295.
- ⁷ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, volume 10, p.106-107
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 107-108
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 108-109
- ¹⁰ B.R. Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches, Vol-1, p-412
- ¹¹ Huntington, Samuel, P: The Third Wave: Demonstration in the late Twentieth Century, Norman and London University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.
- ¹² Fukuyama Francis, 'The End of History?' The National Interest, no.16 (Summer, 1989).

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

¹³ Speeches delivered by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar before the Poona District Law Library on 22nd December, 1952

¹⁴ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, volume 17 (3) p. 475-476

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 477

¹⁶ Bhagwan Das (ED), *Thus spoke Ambedkar, Bheem Patrika*, Vol I, Jullundhar, 1977, p.22.

¹⁷ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, volume 17 (3) p. 480 15. Ibid, p. 482