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## Dr. Ambedkar in the Global Context



- Guest Editor -  
**Dr. Mrs. M.V. Waykole**  
Principal,

Bhusawal Arts, Science & P. O. Nahata Commerce College Bhusawal

- Executive Editor -  
**Dr. A. D. Goswami**  
Vice Principal,  
Bhusawal Arts, Science &  
P. O. Nahata Commerce College Bhusawal

- Associate Editor -  
**Prof. S. P. Zanke**  
Professor & Head, Dept. of English,  
Bhusawal Arts, Science &  
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Plot No 143 Professors colony,

Near Biyani School, Jamner Road, Bhusawal Dist Jalgaon (Maharashtra) 425201

Website: [www.aimrj.com](http://www.aimrj.com) Email: [aimrj18@gmail.com](mailto:aimrj18@gmail.com)

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**Ambedkar's Political Conceptions****Dr. R.G. Suralkar**

Asst. Prof. Dept. of Political Science,

Smt. S.J Arts and Science Mahavidyalaya, Mehkar, Buldhana.

Email- ramesh.suralkar@gmail.com

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was great intellectual and social reformer. In his early stage of career, he realized the plight of untouchables. He dedicated his whole life for socio economic upliftment (Bakshi, 2009). The political philosophy of Ambedkar assist in renegotiating the crisis of western political theory in particular and leading the fights of the people in general. Ambedkar has arisen as a major political philosopher with the rise of dalit movement in contemporary times (Bakshi, 2009).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar emerged on the Indian socio-political area in early 1920s and remained in the head of all social, economic, political and religious efforts for upliftment of the lowest layer of the Indian society called untouchables. Babasaheb was a great researcher who made exceptional contributions as an economist, sociologist, legal luminary, educationalist, journalist, Parliamentarian and as a social reformer and supporter of human rights. Babasaheb organised, united and enthused the untouchables in India to effectively use political means towards their goal of social fairness. Dr. Ambedkar wrote three scholarly books on economics:

1. Administration and Finance of the East India Company
2. The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India
3. The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution

The first two signify his contribution to the field of public finance: The first work evaluating finances of the East India Company during the period, 1792 through 1858 and the second one book analysing the evolution of the Centre State financial relations in British India during the period, 1833 through 1921. The third book, his magnum opus in economics, denotes a seminal contribution to the field of monetary economics.

As a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly (since 1926), Ambedkar gave real expression to the protests of the rural poor through his mass movements. His positive struggle against the prevailing land tenure system called Khoti liberated a vast majority of the rural poor from an extreme form of economic exploitation. His successful agitation against Mahar Vatan liberated a large section of the rural poor from virtual serfdom. He presented a bill in the State Assembly aimed at preventing the malpractices of money-lenders hurting the poor (Bakshi, 2009). In industrial field, Dr. Ambedkar founded in 1936, the Independent Labour Party. While the prevailing trade unions fought for the rights of workers, they were indifferent to the rights of untouchable workers as human beings. The new political party took up their cause. Consequently, as the Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1942 to 1946, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in bringing about several labour reforms including establishment of employment exchanges, generally laying the foundations of industrial relations in Independent India. His ministry also included irrigation, power and other public works. He had immense contribution in shaping the irrigation policy, especially the Damodar Valley Project. Dr. Ambedkar's attack on the caste system was not just aimed at challenging the hegemony of the upper castes but had broader connotation of economic growth and development. He contended that the caste system had reduced the mobility of labour and capital which in turn, obstructed economic growth and development in India. In his memorandum submitted to the British Government titled "States and Minorities" in 1947, Dr. Ambedkar laid down a strategy

for India's economic development. The strategy placed "an obligation on the State to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth".

When India got Independence, Dr. Ambedkar became the first Law Minister of India. Even while drafting the Indian Constitution (as the Chairman, Drafting Committee) in 1948-49, the economist in Dr. Ambedkar was very much alive. He strongly suggested democracy as the 'governing principle of human relationship' but stressed that principles of equality, liberty and fraternity which are the foundations of democracy should not be interpreted narrowly in terms of the political rights alone. He emphasised the social and economic dimensions of democracy and warned that political democracy cannot thrive when there is no social and economic democracy. He gave an expression to the objective of economic democracy by incorporating the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. Being the Law Minister, Dr. Ambedkar fought vigorously for the passage of the Hindu Code Bill, most significant reform for women's rights in respect of marriage and inheritance. He resigned in September 1951 when the Bill did not pass in the Parliament.

The political philosophy of Ambedkar may aid in renegotiating the predicament of western political theory in particular and leading the fights of the masses in general. People can observe Ambedkar's association with the grand political streams such as liberal, radical or conservative through his writings. At the same time, he distinguishes himself with these three dominant political traditions. Ambedkar's philosophy is fundamentally ethical and religious. According to him, the social precedes the political. Social morality is main focus to his political philosophy. He is neither a violent individualist nor a traditional communitarian. His ideas of democracy internalises the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in their true spirit. Though there are many attempts but one may find difficulty in locating him in dominant political traditions. Often this may lead to misinterpretation of the essence of Ambedkar. Ambedkar's political thought stresses a new language to understand the intricacy of his opinions.

#### **Ambedkar's Social precedes political conception:**

Ambedkar's thought, as reproduced in his writings and speeches, has great prominence in drawing the history and growth of social thought in India. It is essential to understand the philosophy of Ambedkar which is the theoretical foundation for the Dalit movement. The central of political thinking of Ambedkar is enclosed in two of his statements, the rights are protected not by law but by social and moral conscience of society, and a democratic form of government presumes a democratic form of society. He deliberates democracy as a form of society, or a mode of associated living, and a social conscience is the only protection of all rights. The origins of democracy are to be examined in social relationships, in terms of associated life among the people who form a society. According to him, social relationships are main factors to democracy. Ambedkar is a social democrat in spirit and practice. His special contribution to political thought lies in his connecting liberty, equality and fraternity to the concept of social democracy, which in line, he relates to democracy as a form of government. He further explained the limitations of social democracy in everyday functioning. He categorically stated while addressing the constituent assembly (November 25, 1949), "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy' which means, a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life." This statement indicates that he defined democracy as a form and method of government whereby radical changes in the economic and social life of people are brought about without killing."

Majority of speeches and writings of Ambedkar are about social reformism. He often discussed and challenged the issue of superiority of social over political issues. Politics have to

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be essentially connected to social issues. The foundations of democracy lie in associated living in society. On the issue of giving primacy to social over political, he diverges with the Congress and the socialists. This is well reproduced in all his writings in general, and 'Annihilation of caste' and 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables' in particular.

It is well assessed that Ambedkar is greatly impacted by all the major political traditions of his times. His political thought has emerged from the three striking traditions of political thought, i.e. liberal, conservative and radical. The sole feature about him is that he has surpassed all these traditions. He was influenced by the thoughts of John Dewey, the practical American and his teacher. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman had considerable impact on his philosophy. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative thinker of British, though we can't brand Ambedkar as a conservative. Ambedkar's notion of liberty comes close to T.H. Green.

Ambedkar's main focus was on the notion of community. According to him, society is always composed of classes. It may be an overstatement to proclaim the theory of class conflict, but the existence of definite classes in society is a fact. an individual in a society is always a member of a class. A caste is an enclosed class. Brahmins created caste and it is extended to other servile classes. Caste is an endogamous unit and also a communal unit. His political theory was based on a moral community. It was as a model to be realised. He was highly critical about the Hindu social order. He debates that Hinduism is not capable to be a community. Buddhism was projected as the ideal having the value of community grounding on morality. He considers that Buddhism tried to found society on the basis of 'reason' and goodness.

His idea of community is very original. He does not approve to either Hindu ideal community or Marxist conception of community based on participation in production process. His notion of community is moral and ethical. It is not automatically available for participation in common affairs. His idea of community has to be created through hard and torturous process of moral revolution.

#### **Ambedkar's Concept of democracy:**

Ambedkar had a long conversation on democratic form of government in his literatures. His conception of democracy is different from the parliamentary democracy of Western Europe. Democracy came with the principles of liberalism. Parliamentary democracy has all the marks of a popular government, a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Ambedkar considered the problems and articulated displeasure against the parliamentary democracy in nations like Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain and some other European nations in proposing the parliamentary democracy in India. Ambedkar explored grounds for the let-down of parliamentary democracy that parliamentary democracy gives no free hand to repression and that is why it became a disgraced institution in the countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany which readily welcomed dictatorships (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). The nations that were opposing dictatorship and vowed to democracy to find their discontent with democracy. First, parliamentary democracy began with equality of political rights in the form of equal suffrage.

Some countries have parliamentary democracy that have not accepted adult suffrage. It has progressed by growing the notion of equality of political rights to equality of social and economic opportunity. It has documented that companies, which are anti-social in purpose, cannot hold the state at bay. With all this, 'the reason for dissatisfaction is due to the understanding that it has unsuccessful to assure to the people for the right to liberty, property or the chase of pleasure. The causes for this failure may be found either in incorrect system or wrong organization or in both (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). He expounded this point by indicating the fault with both wrong ideologies and bad organization in following the ideals of democracy.

The idea of freedom of contract is one of the liable factors for parliamentary democracy in terms of ideology. Parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and did not care to scrutinise the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract, in spite of the fact that they were unequal in negotiating power. It did not mind if the freedom of contract gave the strong opportunity to deceive the weak. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to economic crimes towards the poor, subjugated and dispossessed class (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). The second mistaken philosophy which has vitiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot thrive where there is no social and economic democracy (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). He exemplified this point by comparing the failure of parliamentary democracy in the countries of Italy, Germany and Russia with England and USA. He sensed that there was a greater degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries than existed in the former. Social and economic democracy are major factors of a political democracy (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). Parliamentary democracy developed a desire for liberty. It never made even sleepy acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even strike a balance between liberty and equality.

All political societies are categorized into two classes: The rulers and the ruled. This is almost stratified that leaders are always drawn from the ruling class and the class that is ruled never become the ruling class. This happens because generally people do not see that they govern themselves. They are gratified to establish a government and leave it to govern them. This clarifies why parliamentary democracy has never been a government of the people or by the people and why it has been in reality a government of the hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class. It is this, a vicious organization of political life which had made parliamentary democracy such a dismal failure (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002). It is mistaken to believe that democracy and self-government automatically became realities of life. In fact, the existing governing class is inconsistent with democracy and self-government and made all its efforts to retain its power to govern. Ambedkar realized that self-government and democracy become unsuccessful when the constitution based on adult suffrage comes into existence but when the governing class loses its power to capture the power to govern. In some countries, the submissive classes may succeed in overthrowing the governing class from the seat of authority with just by adult suffrage. In some other countries, the governing class may be so deeply rooted that the submissive classes will need other protections besides adult suffrage to achieve the same end (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002).

Ambedkar blamed the western writers that they were insincere and have not displayed the accurate view of democracy. They casually touched the constitutional morality, adult suffrage and frequent elections as the be-all and end-all of democracy. Ambedkar projected a written constitution for an effective democracy. The conducts of constitutional morality may be essential for the maintenance of a constitutional form of government and he puts more emphasis on the moral society and its customs than the written legal law in governing its people. He invested on social morality for effective working of the democratic form of government. He stated that while devising the constitution, the principle aim of the constitution must be to remove the governing class from its position and to prevent it from remaining as a governing class forever (Roudrigues, Valerian, 2002).

Ambedkar's political dogmas are still relevant to not only to the politics of India but also to politics in South Asia in general. Presently, South Asian countries are facing deep crises, unable to develop political and social institutions to guarantee stability to their societies primarily because of oppressive and social political systems from centuries that were their heritage due to the caste system. The caste system essentially was a system of domination by a small group.



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called Brahmins, who developed most sophisticated forms of cunning into the social control systems of their time in a way that even for centuries they could maintain their dominance. The damage that was done in the process of repression that accompanied the creation and the maintenance of the caste system have become the difficulties to the development of the intelligence, the creativity and the capacity of all the people to deal with contemporary problems. Their past holds them in their slavery. The bonds are so deep-seated into the nervous systems that generation after generation people are reproduced with attitudes that prevent them from realizing the capacity for freedom and capacity for deeper social communion in each other in their social situation. Deep divisiveness inbuilt into the South Asian culture was created by these centuries of understated of social control. Methods of control were formulated as rules of religion and rituals to which the individual life was so deeply tied up. The idea of the individual freedom is so unknown to this cultural heritage. The intricate mechanism that catches people emotionally and psychologically by various kinds of mythical beliefs got so entrenched in the minds of all due to this past.

In 1943, Dr. Ambedkar argued that, "A democratic form of Government presupposes a democratic form of society. The formal framework of democracy is of no value and would indeed be a misfit if there was no social democracy". He further highlighted, "The political never realized that democracy was not a form of Government: it was essentially a form of society". He was highly anxious of the Dalits' fortune in the independent India. For, he could evidently see that most political structure of his time were preparing for a democratic form of government, without considering the varna/caste organisation of the Indian society. That is why, he was adamant on going thorough social reform movements along radical lines, of which, most political conflicts were averse to. He also observed that none of the political organisation was prepared to interfere in the internal affairs of the society. While referring to the experiences of other societies, he had warned, "As experience proves, rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society. If social conscience is such that it is prepared to recognise the rights which law chooses to enact, rights will be safe and secure. But if the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, no law, no Parliament, no Judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the word".

B.R. Ambedkar also identified the cause of the retardation of the Indian creativeness, which is also the source of the obstruction of the attitudes of people of other South Asian countries. He saw that by way of mental exercises this bondage cannot be broken. Efforts must be done to break the social linkages which had tied up the minds of the people over centuries. To this he gave and for the understanding of this processes he devoted his time. And his way of understanding was not by reading into the text of the past but into the lives of the ordinary people of India. In India, people are living under poverty line. That was the evidence to discover the methods by which people lives are destroyed by this terrible heritage.

Jawaharlal Nehru in the Discovery of India attempted to talk about the splendours of India in the past. Ambedkar made efforts to demonstrate how the brilliance was lost and how the bondage of the Indian minds and the Indian spirit and as a result the Indian way of life was come to what it is today. It is this innovation that has the capacity and the liberating effect that not only the population but the entire country is in need of this to face the challenges of the modern times.

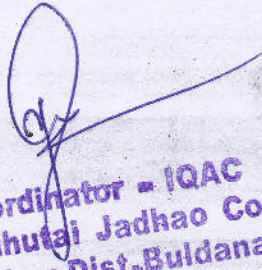
According to historian R.C Guha, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is a unique example of success even in most adverse situations. Today, India is facing many socio-economic challenges such as casteism, communalism, separatism, gender inequality, etc. We need to find the Ambedkar's spirit within us, so that we can pull ourselves from these challenges.



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 Coordinator - IQAC  
 Smt. Sindhutaji Jadhao College  
 Mehkar, Dist. Buldana