

Indian Political Thought (CIA – II Assignment)

Thinker: *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar*

Topic : *B.R. Ambedkar and his Idea of Democracy (Social and Economic), State Socialism and Social Justice.*

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(I) Introduction:

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) was a noted jurist, an exceptional constitutionalist, a profound scholar, a fearless leader of the masses, the hero of the downtrodden and the greatest pioneer of Buddhist revival in India. “His personality combines thought and action. His deeds were rooted in personal experience, so he appealed to the depressed classes to forge ahead on the basis of self-dependence, self-dignity and self-help (*Shabbir 1997*)¹.” His foremost objective was to emancipate the depressed classes and to empower them to lead respectable lives. He passionately fought for the rights of the oppressed classes. It was his conviction and relentless hard work that transformed the depressed classes’ movement into a revolutionary movement. Moreover, he was a nationalist, a democrat and a patriot. Dr. Ambedkar was a pragmatist par excellence and wasn’t swayed by abstract ideologies.

Dr Ambedkar was influenced by **Lord Buddha** and his teachings. Buddhist outlook of life influenced Dr. Ambedkar to a great extent. Buddhist doctrines of Annicca (transitoriness) and Annatta (egolessness) made Dr. Ambedkar adopt a scientific and humanitarian outlook. He believed in the Buddhist teaching that man was the master of his own destiny. One could overcome suffering and pain by continuous action. Dr. Ambedkar penned down the book “Buddha and his Dhamma” highlighting the Buddhist ideology.

John Dewey, Dr. Ambedkar’s mentor at Columbia University, moulded Ambedkar’s thought processes. It was Dewey who encouraged a pragmatic approach to life. Dewey’s emphasis on activist epistemology and concept of instrumentalism appealed to Dr. Ambedkar. The Deweyian idea of democracy as “associated life²” greatly influenced Ambedkar’s writings on society and caste.

Dr. Ambedkar was also influenced by **Karl Marx** and his theory of class struggle. However, he differed with Marx on the nature of exploitation to which the struggling classes are subjected. According to Ambedkar, apart from economic exploitation, the struggling classes were also subjected to social exploitation. Moreover, Ambedkar tried to distinguish between class and caste.

Justice Ranade too had an impact on Dr. Ambedkar’s thinking. Ranade’s philosophy taught Dr. Ambedkar to abandon the imaginary. It taught him to pursue those ideals that were pragmatic. In politics, one must give equal importance to sentiments and temperament of people as compared to intellect and theory. Lastly, in political negotiations one must proceed with the thinking of what is possible. One must not compromise on one’s principles.

Apart from these, Dr. Ambedkar was greatly influenced by **Jyotiba Phule** who propounded that all men were equal by birth. Dr. Ambedkar held Phule in high esteem as he had started the first school for women. Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his book “Who were the Shudras?” to Phule and his extraordinary work in the field of social reform. **J.S. Mill’s** idea of freedom of thought made Ambedkar realize the vitality of individual initiative and personal responsibility.

Dr. Ambedkar believed in realist school of political thought. Lastly, he was assured about the positive role education could play in empowering the depressed classes by creating awareness about their political rights and by raising their cultural level.

(II) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Life and Times:

Dr. Ambedkar was born on 14th April, 1891 in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. Born as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, he belonged to the 'untouchable' Mahar caste. His father, Ramji Ambedkar, served in the military. Many from the Mahar community had joined the Bombay army of the East India Company. Bhim's mother passed away when he was six years old. His father, a follower of Kabir and a strict vegetarian, retired after fourteen years of military service. The Ramji family moved to Konkan and then to Satara. Bhimrao Ambedkar completed his primary schooling in Satara.

Education opened new vistas for young Bhim. However, it came at a cost. Young Ambedkar came across harsh realities of his birth in a lowly caste. In classrooms he was made to sit aloof in a corner. Teachers refused to touch his notebooks. Ambedkar was denied access to common drinking water in school. Only when a high caste person poured water in Bhim's mouth could he quench his thirst. Once instigated by uncontrollable fit of thirst, Ambedkar dared, and drank water from the common drinking water source. Higher caste Hindus beat him up. Such social atrocities were inflicted upon Ambedkar.

Dhananjay Keer writes "*What an indelible impression these cruel disabilities must have made upon Bhim's young mind that was so strong, sensitive and yet so resolute... under the pressure of such maltreatment Bhim was cultivating a spirit of patience in the school of experience. It is said that letters cut into the bark of a young tree grow with age. All such ill-treatment must have engendered in him a burning hatred for Hinduism (Keer 1962)³.*"

Ambedkar was a bright student since his childhood. He fared well in his examinations. He enrolled in Elphinstone High School in Mumbai. In high school he was not allowed to study Sanskrit being an untouchable. In 1907 he passed his matriculation exam with flying colours and later enrolled into Elphinstone College from where he acquired his B.A. in 1912. Thereafter, Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad provided Ambedkar a scholarship which allowed him to pursue higher studies in New York, America. **It was in America that Babasaheb Ambedkar tasted pure freedom. Here he could read, write, sit, stand, eat, sleep, bathe and breathe freely. He wholeheartedly devoted himself to education.**

In 1916, Ambedkar received his Master of Arts for his dissertation on "**Administration and Finance of the East India Company⁴**" and his Ph.D. on "**National Dividend for India: A Historical and Analytical Study⁵**" from Columbia University. Later, Dr. Ambedkar enrolled into London School of Economics and Political Science for further studies. However, Dr. Ambedkar had to discontinue as the Maharaja of Baroda stopped his scholarship and recalled him to Baroda. In the state of Baroda, Dr. Ambedkar was appointed as the military secretary to the Maharaja. Once again due to his caste, Dr. Ambedkar found difficult to find lodging in Baroda. At work, even the high caste peons flung files at him from a safe distance. He left the job and joined Sydenham College, Mumbai as a professor of Political Economy. In 1919 he submitted his presentation to the Southborough Committee demanding a minority status for the "untouchables." In 1920, Dr. Ambedkar began a fortnightly newspaper called **Mook Nayak** (Leader of the Dumb) to promote the cause of the depressed classes. In the same year he started the **Depressed Classes Mission** to promote the welfare of the untouchables.

In 1922 he headed to London to complete his D.Sc. dissertation – on “**The Problem of the Rupee – its Origin and Solution**”⁶. Later he was invited to Bar-at-law from Gray’s Inn and he became a barrister. Dr. Ambedkar began his law practice in Mumbai.

In 1924 he founded the **Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha** (Depressed Classes Welfare Association) to fight for the cause of the “untouchables.” It was Dr. Ambedkar that gave the slogan “educate, organize and agitate” to mobilize Dalits and to fight for their rights. In 1927, Dr. Ambedkar launched a **protest march at Mahad** to secure civil rights of untouchables to draw water from “Chavdar tank.” In the same year he established **Samaj Samata Dal** and started a Marathi fortnightly paper called **Bahishkrit Bharat**. Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar was also the member of Bombay Legislative Council which empowered him to pass several bills for the upliftment of the depressed communities.

In 1928, Dr. Ambedkar founded the **Depressed Classes Education Society** to inculcate the habit of school education within his community members. In the same year, he established a **fortnightly journal called Samata**. Moreover, in 1928, Dr. Ambedkar put forward the issue of constitutional reforms before the Simon Commission. In 1930 Dr. Ambedkar launched another **satyagraha for entry of Dalits** into the Kalaram temple in Nasik. Dr. Ambedkar through his actions had changed the nature of Dalit movement and under his leadership it came to be recognized more as a “**Protest Movement**.”

In 1931, B.R. Ambedkar visited Mahatma Gandhi. He put forward his grievances to the Mahatma stating that in India untouchables were treated worse than animals. Dr. Ambedkar demanded constitutional rights as well as minority rights for the depressed classes. Mahatma Gandhi objected to this demand. He was of the view that political separation of Dalits from the Hindus would strengthen caste system through politics. In the same year, B.R. Ambedkar attended the Round Table Conference in London. It is often remarked how Dr. Ambedkar spoke about the sufferings of the depressed castes or untouchables in the conference and how **he demanded a separate electorate for the depressed classes**. However, in the first session of the conference he warned the British Government on the prevailing temper in India “The time when you were to choose and India was to accept is gone...Let the consent of the people and not the accident of logic be the touchstone of the new constitution, if you desire that it should be worked...⁷”

On 17th August, 1932 the British P.M. announced the “**Communal Award**” in provincial legislatures which created separate electorates for the untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi began a “fast-unto-death” on this issue. Discussions and negotiations between Mahatma and Ambedkar led to the “**Poona Pact**.” According to this pact, instead of separate electorates for untouchables, special concessions such as “reserved seats” for the depressed classes in legislative assemblies would be made available. Finally, the pact led to the withdrawal of the fast by Gandhi.

In 1936, he established the **Independent Labour Party (ILP)**. It contested elections in 17 seats to Bombay province legislature and won 15 of them. In 1937, he introduced bills to abolish the serfdom of agricultural tenants. In 1942, he established a different party called **Scheduled Caste Federation** (it replaced ILP). In 1945, he established **People’s Education Society** to promote educational interests of the depressed classes. Through this society he established Siddhartha College in Bombay and Milind College in Aurangabad.

In 1947, Dr. Ambedkar was appointed as the **first Law Minister** of independent India as well as the **Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the constitution**. His tenure as Law Minister didn't last long as he clashed with his colleagues on various issues. This happened even with Jawaharlal Nehru on the issue of Hindu Code Bill. Finally Ambedkar resigned from the Nehru cabinet in 1951. Gandhiji recommended Dr. Ambedkar's name over Sir Ivor Jennings (internationally renowned constitutional expert) for heading the drafting committee. Despite their differences, Gandhi saw in Ambedkar an outstanding legal and constitutional expert. This speaks volumes about Dr. Ambedkar's fortitude and qualifications. As chairman of the drafting committee, Dr. Ambedkar worked his heart out. Drafting the Indian constitution was a meticulous task which required vast subject domain knowledge as well as general knowledge of polity, geography, economics, history and culture of India. It required statesmanship and wisdom. Dr. Ambedkar is regarded by some political scientists such as Gilchrist as the **world's best constitutionalist**.

In 1951, Dr. Ambedkar founded the **Bharatiya Buddha Jansangha** and in 1955 the **Bharatiya Buddha Maharashtra Jansangha**. In his later days, Dr. Ambedkar was frustrated by lukewarm progress made in eliminating caste-based discrimination from society. Dr. Ambedkar saw a link between caste-based discrimination and religion. According to him, Hindu religion validated caste-based discrimination. He became extremely critical of Hindu religion and concluded that the untouchables would remain where they are as long as they follow Hindu religion. Thus, he decided to leave Hindu religion and convert to Buddhism. On **14th October, 1956 Dr. Ambedkar with over three lakh of his followers converted to Buddhism** in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Dr. Ambedkar formulated a new code of ethics called **Dhamma Diksha**. This vehicle of Buddhism came to be known as "**Navayana**" and Dr. Ambedkar's followers came to be known as **Neo-Buddhists**.

Soon after on **6th December, 1956 Dr. Ambedkar died**. His death was mourned by millions. Dr. Ambedkar left behind a complex body of thought backed by voluminous writings which advocated radical change in political life as well as a plan for an economic structure and cultural and social reconstruction. To quote R.K. Misra "Can a strong nation be built if a quarter of its population is left behind? Till this population is left behind, Ambedkar and his vision will remain relevant. Finally, Babasaheb Ambedkar has more ideological followers than any other leader born in the last 1000 years. There are more statues and busts of Ambedkar than any individual born after Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ (*Pearson 2012*)⁸" Pg 186

Dr. Ambedkar is fondly remembered by many as "**The Father of the Constitution**" as well as "**The Maker of Modern India.**" India conferred the highest award, the **Bharat Ratna**, on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, posthumously in 1990. His birth centenary year was celebrated as "**the year of social justice.**"

(III) Dr Ambedkar's Idea of Democracy:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's description of a **democracy is multi-dimensional**. Democracy, in common usage is often related to political democracy. The principle on which political democracy operates is one man one vote. However, Dr. Ambedkar's perception of democracy is different, formed after a penetrative analysis of the political, social and economic conditions prevailing in India during his life and times.

Several western thinkers made a distinction between state and society, state and the Government and state and nation. Dr. Ambedkar, however, went a step ahead. His concern was the constituent elements that formed these entities i.e. the people. He was more concerned about the socio-economic position of people in the society. **He believed that terms such as nation, country and state were nebulous.** According to him, “nation”, in the philosophical sense, did convey a unit. Sociologically speaking, it comprised of people belonging to multiple classes. Freedom of the nation meant freedom for all the different multiple classes constituting it. Dr. Ambedkar was well aware of the fact that freedom of the nation did not always translate into freedom for all classes. He was of the opinion that considering India “a nation” would be a great delusion. He raised a single question “How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? (*Lokhande 1977*)⁹” He felt that one should quickly recognize this fact. Accepting this fact would be the first step towards uniting the people (divided by multiple castes) into a nation.

Dr. Ambedkar opined that a political democracy was an extension of the society for which the political democracy is established. For instance, in India itself, birth of a person in a particular caste decided his/ her status rather than the person’s ability. Distinctions of high status and low status in society create a social hierarchy based on birth. **Social equality in India was disturbed due to emergence of the caste system.** Indian social structure was based on the caste system. “Brahmins” sat at the top of the hierarchal social system. They were followed by “kshatriyas” and “vaishyas”. At bottom of the social pyramid were “shudras” and the untouchables. Each slot in the social pyramid had a definite set of functions pre-determined for the members of that particular slot to perform. Performance of these pre-determined functions or duties was imperative to ensure the smooth running of the Indian (or more specifically the Hindu) social order. However, here’s the catch, each slot in the pyramid did not enjoy similar status. “Brahmins” were considered to be knowledgeable and were held in high esteem. High status was accorded to “Brahmins.” Whereas “Shudras” and the untouchables were expected to perform menial jobs (such as sweeping the streets, scavenging etc). Thus, low social status was accorded to “shudras” and the untouchables. Shudras were held in servitude. The Hindu social order resulted in social inequalities in the society. With time these inequalities got magnified. The social position of shudras degraded. They were suppressed and discriminated against. **To cap it up, social life in India had its own distinct spill over effects on its political life.** Brahmins, the dominant caste, enjoyed several privileges and wielded political power. Historically, they enjoyed a say in the administration whereas the Shudras and the Untouchables were not allowed to enjoy even civil and political rights. Thus, in the Indian society, glaring inequalities existed. **There was a clear link between the social and political lives of people in India.**

Dr. Ambedkar foresaw what many missed. Several illustrious freedom fighters, social reformers and constitutionalists assumed that establishing political democracy in India would be panacea to all ills plaguing the society. Dr. Ambedkar just put forward these questions: **How would political equality translate into social equality? Did one man one vote necessarily imply one man one value? Did political democracy solve the socio-economic problems embedded in the Indian society?** Dr. Ambedkar foresaw that the vehicle called democracy ran on three wheels i.e. **Political democracy was one such wheel whereas the other two were social democracy and economic democracy.** Together, in tandem, the three wheels in motion ensured the movement of democracy

on the path to achieve welfare of people. Even if one wheel punctured the vehicle would stop running. It would lay motionless and still. Thus, he emphasized on the all round nature of the term “democracy.”

“By ‘democracy’ Ambedkar refers to fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and acceptance of those changes by the people without resorting to disputes and bloodshed (Lokhande 1977).¹⁰” Thus, he denounced the caste system and called for the annihilation of caste. Dr. Ambedkar believed that society as an entity was not just an organism. It is something based on human attitudes. Society doesn’t merely imply a summation of several close knit groups of men living together. It means sharing of customs, traditions, beliefs and thoughts amongst these groups. Dr. Ambedkar shared Dewey’s **idea of democracy as associated living** who observed society as “Society is the process of associating in such ways that experience, ideas, emotions, values are transmitted and made common (Shabbir 1997).¹¹” Thus, there ought to be smooth communication and exchange of ideas and experiences for the establishment and entrenchment of an egalitarian society. However, the caste system acts as blockade in establishing a society based on equality in India. Thus, according to Ambedkar, a caste based society should be done away with and there must be social endosmosis. What would be the alternative to a caste ridden society? **According to Ambedkar, a society based on the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity should be foundation of a democratic society.**

For him, political democracy could be sourced only from a democratic society. A democratic society required the elimination of socio-economic inequalities existing in the society. It called for social equality. In other words, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was keen to ensure that the principle of one man one vote meant one man one value not only in the political life of a person but also in his/ her economic and social life

Dr Ambedkar opined **“We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy (Shabbir 1997).¹²”** Moreover, economic liberty must follow or walk along political liberty since political liberty by itself is meaningless if people are half-starved and ill-clad. **“Dr. Ambedkar goes a step further and suggests that political and economic rights should be supported and sustained by social equality (Lokhande 1977).¹³”** Keeping in mind the Hindu social structure, Dr. Ambedkar was assured that it was essential to link political constitution to social institutions of India if democracy was to become real and meaningful.

(IV) Pre-requisites for the Working of a Successful Democracy (in no particular order)

Firstly, an **effective opposition** is *sine qua non* for democracy. Opposition parties keep a check on the party-in-power. They act as vigilantes and scrutinize the policies and programmes of the Government. According to Ambedkar, the presence of opposition ensures a responsible as well as an accountable Government.

Secondly, the **existence of a permanent and neutral civil service** is essential for carrying out and implementing the policies and programmes of the Government. By the term “neutral”, it is simply means that the bureaucracy isn’t affiliated to any political party. This allows the civil servants to function without fear or favour.

Thirdly, **democracy should not lead to the tyranny of the “majority”** The Government led by the majority should assure safety and protection to the minorities. Interests of the minorities should be respected and promoted. Moreover, the majority should not hurt the sentiments of the minority or impose upon them.

Fourthly, Dr. Ambedkar believed that in the absence of moral order democracy will go to pieces. **Democracy should contain public conscience** i.e. “a conscience that becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer and it means everybody whether he suffers that particular wrong or not, is prepared to join the aggrieved to secure justice. (*Lokhande 1977*)¹⁴ A nation may have a constitution that preaches a particular way of life. But in the end it is just a set of written laws. It cannot inculcate in people “a sense of morality (*Lokhande 1977*)¹⁵” Value-based citizenship, which makes a citizen responsible and active, must develop in a society.

Fifthly, **a set of basic human rights or fundamental rights** must be provided to the people without any discrimination. Besides the provision of these rights, there must be mechanisms and procedures in place to ensure that rights of individuals are not violated or infringed upon by other individuals or by the state. Thus it was essential that declaration of rights was accompanied by provision of remedies.

Sixthly, the depressed classes must be given sufficient political power by giving them adequate representation in the legislature of the country. Moreover, they must have the right to elect their own men as their representatives by adult suffrage and by separate electorate. Thus, **empowering the depressed classes is ensures successful operation of democracy.**

Seventhly, **absence of glaring inequalities in the society**, according to Dr. Ambedkar, was crucial for the successful operation of democracy. A society having social divisions also “has within itself the germs of a bloody revolution, and perhaps it would be impossible for democracy to cure them.¹⁶” Moreover, **the society must be based on the principle of liberty, equality and fraternity.** Equality meant both social and political equality. Liberty meant both economic and political liberty. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had an interesting take on “fraternity.” Fraternity, basically means, solidarity and brotherhood among the people of a nation. Earlier it was stated that Dr. Ambedkar did not recognize India as a nation. Accepting this would be the first step towards uniting the people into a nation. Without a nation fraternity cannot exist. And fraternity, according to Ambedkar is a pre-requisite for establishment of liberty and equality. **“Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.”¹⁷**

Lastly, Dr. Ambedkar opines that **democracy must make possible a way of life through which social justice can be secured and established.** According to Lokhande, “Social justice demands that the society should promote the welfare of all and not merely the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Otherwise the interests of the majority might gain precedence over those of the minorities (*Lokhande 1977*).¹⁸”

(V) Threats to Democracy: Dr. Ambedkar highlighted three threats to democracy which are as follows:

1) **Dr. Ambedkar denounced hero-worship.** He felt that no leader was so accomplished as to be bestowed with blind faith of the people. No leader was greater than the cause he promoted or fought for. Dr Ambedkar cited the example of George Washington. When Washington was requested by the people to contest the second time for the presidency of USA, Washington said, “My dear people, you forgotten the purpose for which we made this constitution. We made this constitution because we did not want a hereditary monarchy or a ruler or a dictator (*Lokhande 1977*)¹⁹” Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar justified his stand – “No man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty.”²⁰”

In present day India, hero-worship is status-quo. **The political scene in India is dominated by charismatic personality cults.** Indira Gandhi is a fine example of this. The Gandhi-Nehru family heir did not even think twice before trampling all over democracy to establish the Emergency in 1975. The result: fundamental rights of the people were suspended. Democracy was trapped in a cage by an idol worshipped by people. Currently, we have Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh and the like. Besides regional leaders national leaders such as Narendra Modi too enjoy unfathomable fan following. People blindly follow these leaders without even analysing their party stand, policy and programme. Dr. Ambedkar was fortunate not to live long enough to see this practice of hero-worship transform into sycophancy – a trend that is slowly eating up India.

2) **Dr. Ambedkar held that in order to maintain democracy it must be in the interest of people to quit unconstitutional means of revolution.** Nothing justifies unconstitutional means as long as the constitution exists and provides for constitutional means to register protest or put forward a point of disagreement in order to pursue socio-economic objectives. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that means such as civil disobedience, Satyagraha and non-cooperation must be abandoned. The use of unconstitutional means in a constitutional democracy promotes nothing but anarchy. “The sooner they (unconstitutional methods of revolution) are abandoned the better for us (*Shabbir 1997*).²¹”

In 2011, the Jan Lokpal Bill movement spearheaded by Anna Hazare employed the Gandhian method of Satyagraha to compel the parliament to pass the most debated anti-corruption bill. The end was noble. However, the means adopted have been debated. “Some saw it as an unwarranted infringement of civil society over legislative prerogative.”²²”

It is interesting to see how Dr. Ambedkar advises citizens against unconstitutional methods of revolution with special emphasis on Gandhian methods of resistance. However, unlike Aristotle, Dr. Ambedkar doesn't delve further into the causes of revolution. Aristotle, in his political theory, advises the king to take several steps to prevent revolution during his rule. However, Dr. Ambedkar doesn't caution the parliament or people's representatives of why people might revolt and what should it/ they do to avoid such a circumstance.

3) **The last threat to democracy, according to Dr. Ambedkar, was that the people/ the nation might be satisfied with just political democracy.** However, this should not be the case. “A political democracy without an economic and social democracy is an invitation to trouble and danger. Social democracy alone can assure to the masses the right to liberty, equality and fraternity. (*Lokhande 1977*)²³” Thus, a country must constantly strive to achieve social democracy i.e. a way of life where social equality is guaranteed along with no existence of socio-economic inequalities.

Though India is trying to secure social justice (a way of entrenching social democracy) it has not succeeded. Dr. Ambedkar had predicted that a political democracy which failed to secure social democracy might be blown up.

(VI) Dr. Ambedkar's Inclination:

Dr. Ambedkar was inclined towards parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy, according to him, stood on the foundation of liberalism. It operated on the principle of liberty. Dr. Ambedkar analysed this system and critiqued it. He felt that such a system was unaware of the economic inequalities prevailing in the society and it ignored the problems of the downtrodden. It disregarded the fundamental principle of equality. Thus, according to Ambedkar, a true democracy operated on the twin principles of liberty and equality. In India, we do have political democracy which operates on the principle of one man one vote. However, this political democracy, established through a parliamentary system, has failed to translate into social and economic democracy.

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.

(VII) Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on Economic Democracy:

Dr. Ambedkar found close **connection between social and economic life of a person.** His theory on the importance of economic democracy is both an eye opener and enlightening. Dr. Ambedkar differentiates between the life of an animal and that of a man.

An animal is concerned with satiating its physical wants/ desires such as nutritive wants, reproductive desires and the like. Man, too, looks for the fulfilment of his physical appetite. But man is a greater species than any other animal due to the virtue of reason. Reason allows him to think, to question, to observe and analyse life and all that which constitutes it. Thus the ultimate goal of an animal's existence is to satiate its physical appetite whereas **“the ultimate goal of man is culture (Lokhande 1977).²⁴”** Culture is crucial for the progress of mankind. Dr. Ambedkar says “The aim of human society must be to enable every person to lead a life of culture, which means civilization of mind as distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants (Lokhande 1977).²⁵ Satisfaction of mere physical wants means to live life whereas to lead a life of culture means to live life worthily. To live life is to prepare vanilla ice cream – it is plain and simple. But to live life worthily implies adding chocolate syrup to the vanilla ice cream may be even sprinkling almonds and cashews on the vanilla ice cream laced with chocolate syrup – it means to add value and meaning to life.

However, majority or actually all of the time and energy that humans possess is spent on securing a plain and simple life. Adding value to it becomes difficult. Living life worthily becomes difficult. **A life of culture becomes difficult because in order to live life worthily one must live it first.**

It is at this juncture, that Ambedkar introduces the **concept of leisure**. The presence of leisure in an individual's life is crucial to lead a life of culture. Leisure enables a person to invest his time and energy in adding value to his/ her plain and simple life rather than investing it in preparing vanilla ice cream. **Leisure allows a person to afford culture**. It is vital to answer the question: What is leisure? According to Dr. Ambedkar, "Leisure means the lessening of the toil and effort necessary for satisfying the physical wants of life (*Lokhande 1977*).²⁶" Leisure simply saves a man's resources (not all but most of it) which he would have otherwise spent on securing basic necessities of life. Availability of the saved resources enables him to pursue higher goals in life. It enables him to strive to civilize his mind.

Let's just deviate for the moment. Dr. Ambedkar, in his theory, **doesn't clarify whether politics belongs to the domain of human culture** when he tries to expound his thoughts on leisure. Politics, in common discourse, is defined as struggle for power. The desire for power is a raw desire similar to the physical wants. However, it can also be argued that in the hierarchy of basic physical wants power would not come first since survival and whatever it requires forms the first few wants of human life. Thus, this pushes power much into the cultural domain. Aristotle, in his political thought, allowed a person to participate in the affairs of state provided he had leisure. Leisure, according to Aristotle, could be derived by owning property and slaves. Logically speaking, ownership of property ensures financial stability whereas having slaves at one's disposal ensured that they looked after the day-to-day affairs of the household saving precious time for their master. Thus, in Aristotle's theory too, leisure allowed an individual to pursue higher ends rather than being stuck in the routine rut. Unlike Aristotle, Ambedkar never promoted slavery (though the term had quite different connotation during the times of each of these thinkers) for the provision of leisure.

Dr. Ambedkar tried to answer the question of **how leisure can be made possible**. In this context, Dr. Ambedkar understood the importance of production of certain goods necessary for basic human needs. The effort that went into the production of these goods took up most of man's time and energy. Leisure can only be provided if the effort that went into the production of these basic goods is reduced. This leads us to an even more important question: **What can provide leisure?** To quote Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, "Only when machine takes place of man (then leisure is produced). There is no other means of producing leisure. Machinery and modern civilization are thus indispensable for emancipating a man from leading the life of a brute and for providing him with leisure and for making a life of culture possible (*Lokhande 1977*).²⁷"

While analysing Ambedkar's thought on economic democracy it becomes essential to study his view on leisure. A common perception is formed in our minds that Dr. Ambedkar was concerned with fulfilment of minimum bare necessities of life. To adore this perception is to err. For Dr. Ambedkar accomplishment of these necessities meant that one could devote his self to finer aspects of life. **Dr. Ambedkar held economic democracy in high esteem**. For him economic democracy was equally important as compared to political democracy. **"The constitution wishes to lay down an ideal before those who would be forming the Government. That ideal is economic democracy (*Lokhande 1977*).²⁸"** To Ambedkar economic democracy meant just one thing: one man one value. It was on this principle that he wish to lay down the foundation of economic democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar, was even concerned, **how economic democracy should be bought about.** He was open to diverse views on this subject. He knew that for some the capitalist system was the perfect form of economic democracy, for some the establishment of a socialistic state was the best form of economic democracy and yet for some others communist system was the ideal state of economic democracy. Dr. Ambedkar respected such views. He agreed that the Directive Principles of State Policy had been deliberately worded in such a manner that allowed people of different ways of thinking enough space to reach the ideal of economic democracy in their own manner. Thus, in pursuit of making his principle of one man one value real he wished that political democracy be reinforced by economic democracy. At a time when the Indian National Congress had no definite plan or programme about the economic structure that India would follow, Ambedkar had already come up with his principle of one man one value.

However, Ambedkar was aware of the fact that the doctrine of one man one vote was whole heartedly implemented in the political field where it displayed positive results. But at the same time this political doctrine failed to translate into the much imagined “one man one value” in the economic sphere. **Dr. Ambedkar opined that theory wise one man one vote ought to translate into one man one value. In reality it didn't.**

Dr. Ambedkar blamed the age-old perception that constitutional lawyers had with respect to making of the constitution. For these constitutional lawyers, formulating a responsible Government and preventing tyranny by Government was the sole object of the constitution. Such old-time constitutional lawyers never looked ahead of adult suffrage and fundamental rights. **They failed to gauge that times had changed and the reach of the constitution had to be widened.** It was within the ambit of the constitution to prescribe the shape and form of not only the political structure but also the economic structure of the society. Dr. Ambedkar realized that it was about time that a constitution constructed a framework for the political as well as economic system to operate. The constitution shouldn't shy away from describing a particular form of economic structure it wishes to adopt or the economic ideal it wishes the state to follow. Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar felt that countries like India which were latecomers in the field of constitution making should not copy the faults of other countries.

(VIII) Dr. Ambedkar on Capitalism:

Dr. Ambedkar had studied the system of social economy based on capitalism. According to him, capitalism violated certain premises of political democracy. Political democracy functions on various premises. However in this context two premises come to the fore. One, an individual shall not quit any of his fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution in lieu of a privilege. Two, the state shall not trust private individuals with governing powers. Dr. Ambedkar was sure that capitalism, which inspired individuals to pursue personal goals and gains, did undermine if not violate the abovementioned two premises on which political democracy functions. **“How many have to relinquish their constitutional rights in order to gain their living? How many have to subject themselves to be governed by private individuals? (Lokhande 1977)²⁹”**

Dr. Ambedkar delved deeper as to why the need arose for an individual to quit his constitutional rights. He had put forward a crucial question: “If a person who is unemployed is offered a choice between a job and with an interdict on joining a union and the exercise of his right to speech,

expression, association etc can there be any doubt as to what his choice will be? How can it be otherwise? (Lokhande 1977)³⁰” **To such an unemployed person fundamental rights are of no value. Securing subsistence is more important than securing one’s rights.** Moreover, he spoke even about the employed person and the risk he/ she faced. The state wrongly assumed that the guarantee of fundamental rights was enough to secure the lives of employees.

It wrongly assumed that state intervention in private affairs (economic and social life) ought to be minimal to ensure that the fruits of individual liberty are available to the society. This thinking reminds one of John Maynard Keynes’ economic thought. Post the Great Depression (1929), Keynes denounced the classical school of thought which believed that state intervention in the economic sphere should be minimal. Keynes felt that the classical school of thought was topsy-turvy and he set it straight. Keynes was for state intervention in critical economic aspects of life. Coming back to Dr. Ambedkar’s proposition that the state refrains from intervention to protect individual liberty. **But he raises a serious question: To whom and for who is this liberty? Which members of the society benefit from minimal state intervention in the economic sphere?** “Obviously, this liberty is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase the hours of work and reduce the rate of wages. In other words, what is called liberty from the control of the state is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer. (Lokhande 1977)³¹”

According to him, minimal state intervention in the economic sphere allows private employers to make the rules of the game thereby employing workers on terms and conditions which are exploitative in nature. This ensures mass production of goods at fixed intervals and smooth functioning of the industry but at the cost of the workers’ plight.

(IX) Dr. Ambedkar on State Socialism

Dr. Ambedkar was aware of the fact that individual liberty was closely linked to the shape and structure of economic aspect of social life. According to him, this link becomes real or operative only when state socialism is established. However, **he faced a dilemma on the subject of how to establish state socialism.** If state socialism is activated through political democracy, the majority in the legislature might suspend or abrogate it. If state socialism is entrenched through a dictatorship there is a full and definite possibility of curtailment of individual liberty. On one hand the rule of majority bothered him whereas on the other the rule of one individual scared him. To solve this dilemma, **Dr. Ambedkar advocated a system of parliamentary democracy based on state socialism i.e. state socialism would be supported by constitutional law which would be unalterable.**

(i) In this way, he wished to achieve three objectives:

- (a) Establishment of socialism. (b) Retention of parliamentary democracy.
- (c) Avoidance of dictatorship.

Dr. Ambedkar’s was for state socialism in critical spheres of economic life. But what was even more interesting is the way in which he wished to implement state socialism. Establishment of state socialism was not according to the whims and fancies of the legislature but through constitutional

law which would make it unalterable by any act of the legislature or executive. To explain in simple terms, he wanted the legislature to work (formulate economic policies) within an unalterable framework of state socialism rather than allowing it to set, adjust or discard this particular framework. One can draw parallels with the basic structure of the constitution doctrine. Of course, the basic structure doctrine was adopted much later but the analogy assists in driving the point home. Somewhere Dr. Ambedkar wished to make state socialism a part of the basic structure of the constitution.

(ii) Plan for Introducing State Socialism

- 1) State ownership and state management of key industries in critical sectors of the economy.
- 2) State ownership of basic industries. Management of such industries can be carried out by the state or by corporations set up by the state.
- 3) State monopoly in the Insurance sector. Dr. Ambedkar promoted active role of state in the insurance sector. According to him, the state should force every individual in the country to take out a life insurance policy in his/ her name. Such a policy would not be uniform for all. It would depend upon the of the policy buyer i.e. an insurance policy relative to the income of the policy buyer. Thus, he demanded nationalization of insurance sector.
- 4) The state acquires **subsisting rights** in state industries. For instance, in case of agriculture, the state can acquire agricultural land for collective farming. In order to acquire this land it is entitled to pay a debenture to the owner (landlord, tenant, and mortgagee) of the land. The debenture can be equivalent to the value of right of the debenture holder in the land. The state shall moreover decide the method of payment to the debenture holder. Debenture is transferable and inheritable; however the neither debenture holder nor the transferee from the original holder nor his heir may claim any right in the land or demand return of the land which has already been compensated for. Lastly, the debenture holder is entitled to interest over his debenture (at a rate prescribed by law) which the state shall pay in cash or kind.
- 5) **Role of state in agriculture:** Dr. Ambedkar promoted state ownership in agriculture. He vouched for collective method of cultivation. State would acquire land for agriculture. Land acquired would be later divided into standard farms. These standard farms would be let out by state to residents of a village (tenants) who would then cultivate the farm on a collective basis.
 - a) The state shall form rules regarding cultivation of farms. It may even regulate the method of cultivation.
 - b) The produce belonged to all the tenants who worked on a particular farm. After deducting basic charges, these tenants could share the produce among themselves.
 - c) The standard farms would be let out to tenants for cultivation without any discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.
 - d) Cultivation of farms would be such that there would be no landlord, no tenant or no landless labourer.

e) The state shall finance the cultivation of collective farms. By finance, it is basically meant that the state shall sponsor or assist the farmer in purchase of farm equipment, fertilizer, seeds etc and secure supply of water for irrigation of the farms.

f) **State revenue through agriculture:** The state might levy charges on the produce of the farm. It can charge the farmer for the capital goods supplied. It can charge the farmer a portion of the produce to recover the rent of letting out the land, thereby securing land revenue. It can charge the farmer for payment to debenture holder.

g) Lastly, the state can impose penalties on those who violate the agricultural contract. It can even impose fines on those who fail to make efficient use of resources provided by the state or on those who operate against the practise of collective farming.

6) Lastly, **this scheme of state socialism would operate only for a period of ten years starting from the very day when the Constitution would come into force.**

It must be borne in mind that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had no orientation for lucrative ideologies. His only concern was welfare and progress of the downtrodden masses. His vague assertion of democratic values and outright denunciation of dictatorship ensured that he was in the bad books of certain Communists who supported world revolution.

(iii) In reality, Dr. Ambedkar's programme of socialism was never adopted. Initially, Dr. Ambedkar wished to include his programme of socialism in the Fundamental Rights chapter (Part III of the Indian Constitution). However, Sardar Patel and J.B. Kripalani (who were in-charge of preparing the chapter on Fundamental Rights) rejected Amdekar's idea of state socialism. Later he approached Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru to include his plan for state socialism in the Fundamental Rights section of the constitution. However, both of them turned down Ambedkar's request. Moreover, he was upset with Nehru's Objectives Resolution which he considered to be a departure from the idea of state socialism. He felt that the Resolution which failed to advocate nationalization of land might not ensure social, political and economic justice.

(X) Social Justice

What is social justice? It is crucial to comprehend this concept before moving ahead. The term "social" widely means societal i.e. relating to human society and its members. It means something related to the structure and organization of society. It also includes economic and political arrangements in a society. It is equally imperative to understand the term "justice" so as to satisfactorily understand social justice. Plato's conception of justice was duties oriented i.e. each individual should perform his/ her duty in a society whereas Aristotle's conception of justice was rights oriented. Aristotle propounded the concept of distributive justice. He added "injustice arises when equals are treated unequally and unequals are treated equally." Over time the concept of justice has evolved. In modern times, Robert Nozick, John Rawls and David Miller have added their perspective to the concept of justice.

Nozick in his *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) propounds justice as unbridled enjoyment of natural rights by an individual. Of course, this theory is based on Lockean philosophy of natural rights. Nozick promotes minimal state intervention in social and economic affairs, a state which is

extremely liberal in civil life. He believes that rights of an individual cannot be sacrificed for greater social good. This concept is often regarded as Proprietarian concept, which sees justice as legitimacy. Another concept, the Utilitarian concept, sees justice as welfare. And yet another concept, the Contractarian concept, of which John Rawls is an advocate, sees justice as fairness. It is mostly concerned with fair equality of opportunity. However, David Miller's standpoint is quite clear. He simply believes that in order to understand "social justice" it is vital to first understand justice as a whole and then one can search for that part of justice which is social in nature. Miller further added that social justice ought to be viewed in a context. For instance, he studied the concept of social justice in three different kind of societies, namely, primitive, hierarchal and market societies. Borrowing from Miller's perspective, one can conclude that social justice isn't universal or uniform. It varies according to the political system a state adopts. Social justice has different set of meanings attached to it in a capitalist state or in a socialist state or in a democratic one (*Shabbir 1997*).³²

Broadly speaking, **social justice** relates to the balance between an individual's rights and social control ensuring the fulfilment of the legitimate expectations of the individual under the existing laws and to ensure him benefits and protection against any encroachment on his rights. **Social justice strives to strike a balance between individual rights and the rights of a society as a whole.** It basically implies provision of equal opportunities to all without any sort of discrimination amongst them. It aims to secure the interest of the larger section of society rather than the interests of few handful individuals.

Thus, social justice tries to secure the physical, mental and spiritual well being of all members of society and a fair distribution of rights. **There is no consensus to what degree the state can intervene and curtail individual liberty for greater social good.** However, it is clear that social justice is a dynamic term which complements and provides sustenance to "rule of law" and aims at eliminating social or economic inequalities plaguing the social structure. **Its ideal end is establishment of a just society.**

(XI) Dr. Ambedkar and Social Justice:

India, a democratic state adopted a mixed economy post-independence. It wished to walk the path of a welfare state. Dr. Ambedkar, fondly known as the "the champion of social justice", was the pioneer of social justice in India. He added fresh perspective to the concept of social justice and set out to codify his idea of social justice by playing a crucial role in drafting the constitution of India.

For Dr. Ambedkar **social justice was incidental to the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.** For him social justice was similar to mutual respect, equal dignity, human equality, equal and just distribution of public goods, mutual sympathy and a fair and just society without any form of discrimination. As mentioned earlier, for Dr. Ambedkar political democracy was to be based on social democracy.

It was this social democracy that would ensure social justice for its citizens. Why? Social democracy identified the trinity of "equality, liberty and fraternity" as sacred and key principles of life. The three ideals worked in tandem without being divorced from each other.

Equality, as an ideal, was dear to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. As a child, Dr. Ambedkar (a Dalit by birth) was a victim of social injustice – he was denied equal treatment in school. As he grew up, in all walks of life he had to face discrimination on the basis of caste. Thus, it became his life mission to ensure that his Dalit brothers and sisters as well as other backward and downtrodden classes were treated equally in the society without any discrimination. “On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality which means elevation for some and degradation for others. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and political 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 the structure of political democracy... (Shabbir 1997)³³”

Dr. Ambedkar’s method of seeking social justice underwent a striking transformation during the course of his life. Initially he relied on active means of resistance such as forceful entry into the temples, forceful use of public amenities etc. However, he realized that the tentacles of the diabolic caste system had penetrated deep enough into the Hindu social order and sporadic acts of resistance weren’t enough to even shake the rigid caste system. Hereon, he concentrated on law as a tool of social transformation. He concentrated on securing constitutional rights and guarantees for his community members. He concentrated on socio-economic reform of his community. Thus, he wanted processes and institutions in place that would keep on attacking the caste system unless it was demolished.

(i) Pursuit of Social Justice through Constitutionalism: Dr. Ambedkar was keen to put the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity in motion. He tried to entrench the concept of social justice in India through constitutionalism. Dr. Ambedkar’s contribution to social justice is evident in the philosophy, policy and ideals of the constitution.

1) Preamble to the Indian Constitution imagines a social order in which – **justice (social, economic and political)**, liberty (of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship), equality (of status and opportunity) and fraternity (assuring dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the nation) – are the prime goals. According to Basu, “Social justice is the comprehensive form to remove social imbalance by law harmonising the rival claims or the interests of the different groups and sections in the social structure or individuals by means of which alone it would be possible to build up a welfare state (Basu 2013).³⁴” The preamble explicitly conveys the philosophy of the constitution and the intention of the founding fathers of which Dr. Ambedkar was the chief architect.

2) Fundamental Rights (Part III of the Indian Constitution): Social justice (by the virtue of various articles in Part III) was identified as a fundamental right by the constitution. Fundamental rights provide for an environment, conducive enough, to ensure social reconstruction of society and to eliminate prevailing man-made inequalities of any form. Thus, Part III of the constitution calls for a just and egalitarian social order.

(i) **Article 14** of the Indian constitution provides for “equality before law” and “equal protection before law.”

(ii) **Article 15** prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, sex, caste, race or place of birth. All have equal access to public amenities such as wells, roads, tanks, bathing ghats and other such public places. Moreover, nothing in this article would prevent the state to make special provisions for the progress of weaker sections of society.

(iii) Dr. Ambedkar ensured that the constitution guaranteed “equality of opportunity” as a Fundamental Right. **Article 16** guarantees this fundamental right. But he did realize that equality of opportunity would also mean undue benefit to those who were already at a superior position on the social ladder. This compelled Dr. Ambedkar to introduce “equality of condition” in the constitution. Equality of condition basically meant the scheme of reservation for the weaker sections of society particularly the scheduled castes.

(iv) **Article 17** abolishes untouchability whereas **Article 23** abolishes forced labour. These articles were incorporated in the constitution to uplift the depressed classes (particularly the untouchables) and to achieve the ideal of one man one value.

(v) **Article 32** (consisting constitutional remedies) was identified by him as the cornerstone of the entire constitution. To quote Dr. Ambedkar “If I was asked to name any particular article of the constitution as the most important – an article without which this constitution would be a nullity – I would not refer to any other article except this one. It is the very soul of the constitution and the very heart of it (*Basu 2013*)³⁵”

3) Directive Principles of State Policy (D.P.S.P) (Part IV of the Indian Constitution): provide an ideal framework to the state to mould its policies in a particular manner. However, these principles are non-justiciable in the court of law. The state is expected to follow these principles in spirit. It may or may not implement them. Nevertheless, they are fundamental in the governance of the country. Dr. Ambedkar called D.P.S.P as “Instrument of Instructions” to the legislative bodies and the executive. He felt that D.P.S.P should not be merely treated as “pious declarations.” Dr. Ambedkar hoped that in future these principles would be made the foundation of all legislative and executive action. Dr. Ambedkar declared – “Every Government... shall... even under hard and unpropitious circumstances, always strive in the fulfilment of these directives.”³⁶

(i) **Article 38** directs the state to further welfare of people by securing such a social order in which social justice along with political and economic justice “shall inform all the institutions of national life.”³⁷ This article is considered to be the main ingredient of the Part IV of the constitution.

(ii) **Article 46** directs the state to look after (with special care) and further the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society (particularly scheduled castes and scheduled tribes).

Moreover, it directs the state to protect these weaker sections from all kinds of social discrimination. Thus, through the Preamble, Part III and Part IV of the constitution Dr. Ambedkar wished to establish an equal society where caste-based inequalities would be history and human values of justice (securing human dignity) the only governing fundamental.

4) Special Safeguards for Scheduled Castes

1) **Article 330, 332 and 334** provide for reservation of seats in legislative bodies, educational institutions and Government jobs. This scheme of reservation or “positive discrimination” is meant for Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes. Its sole objective is social, political and economic upliftment of these weaker sections that have faced centuries of social degradation and discrimination. However, this scheme of reservation is a temporary provision.

2) **Article 338** provides for a National Commission for Scheduled Castes which shall investigate matters related to special provisions (under the Indian constitution) for SCs. It is duty bound to report its investigations to the President of India.

(ii) Pursuit of Social Justice Outside the Framework of the Constitution:

Dr. Ambedkar’s pursuit of social justice wasn’t limited within the boundaries of the constitution. He worked relentlessly to uplift the weaker sections of society particularly the depressed classed even outside the framework of the constitution. By the phrase “outside the framework of constitution” it is not meant that he adopted extra-constitutional means to secure justice for the weaker sections. It only means that he didn’t limit his efforts (to secure social justice for depressed classes) by just preparing constitutional guarantees.

Dr. Ambedkar, during several instances, was on the ground, leading ‘satyagrahas’ for emancipation of untouchables and depressed classes. He was not just an armchair theorist but a man of action. Thus, it is critical to iterate his contribution to social justice outside the universe of the Indian constitution. One may argue that Dr. Ambedkar denounced methods of revolution such as “satyagrahas” and yet he himself resorted to such methods. It is crucial to remember that he denounced such methods provided constitutional methods to register protest were available. He adopted “satyagrahas” as constitutional methods

1) Upliftment of Scheduled Castes (Shudras) and Untouchables (Ati-Shudras): Before iterating the actions Dr. B.R. Ambedkar undertook for the upliftment of the depressed classes it is crucial to understand why he did so. It is crucial to comprehend his thoughts that inspired him to fight for the cause of the depressed classes particularly the untouchables.

Historical Interpretation of the Caste System: Dr. Ambedkar was against the caste system. Caste system, according to him, was the only reason for the existence of untouchability. In his opinion the caste system originated from Varnashram which was an offshoot of Brahmanical religion. And the root of Brahmanical religion was authorization of power. It was Brahmanical religion that gave birth to the Brahmanical Hindu social order based on Chaturvarna system. Shudras, according to him, were initially one of the Aryan communities and were recognized as a part of Kshatriya varna. Thus, initially there weren’t four but three varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Shudras). However, Shudra kings inflicted indignities on Brahmins. Brahmins stopped carrying out the “sacred thread” ritual for Shudras. In the absence of the sacred thread, the social position of Shudras degraded over time. They fell below Vaishyas in the social hierarchy. Thus, the creation of the fourth varna in the Hindu social order.

Dr. Ambedkar provides a priceless insight when he opines that **the Shudras and the untouchables didn't have a caste consciousness**. "Castes are enclosed units and it is their conspiracy with clear conscience that compels the excommunicated to make themselves into a caste. The logic of this adverse circumstance is merciless, and it is in obedience to its force that some unfortunate groups find themselves enclosed, because others in enclosing themselves have closed them out with the result new groups... by a mechanical law are constantly being converted into castes to a bewildering multiplicity³⁸." Thus, it is clear that the Shudras and the untouchables were forced, unknowingly so, into forming a caste. Dr. Ambedkar viewed all of this as a Brahminical conspiracy. He wished to destroy the caste system and put an end to Brahmanical domination in the Hindu social order.

Condition of the Shudras and Ati-Shudras: According to Dr. Ambedkar, Shudras in the Hindu social order (based on caste system) were worse off than slaves. The system of slavery at least obligated the master of the slave to provide bare minimum necessities such as food, clothing and shelter to the slave. The system of untouchability fostered uncontrolled economic exploitation of the untouchables. **The upper-caste Hindus had no moral or economic obligation towards the untouchables.**

Over time, the Shudras and the untouchables were subjected to social discrimination of Herculean proportions. It is beyond the scope of the assignment to iterate or narrate all the hardships they had to go through. For instance, Shudras and untouchables were made to live in separate settlements on the periphery of village. In some cases, they had to tie a bell around their neck to announce their arrival. They were denied access to public tanks, wells and temples. Thus, one can safely declare, that the depressed classes had faced centuries of untold degradation and exploitation. Dr. Ambedkar himself had been a victim of social injustice. At various points in his life unequal and lowly treatment was meted out to him.

(a) Dr. Ambedkar was **against the practice of untouchability**. According to Dr. Ambedkar, the monster of untouchability could be slayed only by replacing socio-religious status of an individual with a secular status. That is where his much cherished tenet of one man one value came in.

(b) He wished **to liberate the untouchables psychologically**. He told them, "Never regard yourselves as untouchables. Live a clean life. Dress yourselves like the touchable. Attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self-help (*Lokhande 1977*).³⁹" He wished to cultivate in them a sense of self-respect, dignity and consciousness of equality of status.

(c) Dr. Ambedkar propagated radical social change in all walks of human life. For social rehabilitation of the depressed classes, Dr. Ambedkar promoted inter-caste marriages and inter-dining. He advocated complete **overhaul of the Hindu social order**. For him, the edifice of Hindu social order had decayed. A new and fresh social order was his priority. To achieve this he even denounced the Hindu "Shastras" that justified the caste system. Dr. Ambedkar burnt copies of Manusmriti (a sacred text of Hindus or their charter of rights which Ambedkar regarded as a symbol of injustice) in public.

(d) Dr. Ambedkar mobilized Dalits and **launched protest marches**. In Mahad, he launched a protest march for rights of Shudras to draw water from the Chavdar tank. In Nasik, Dr. Ambedkar initiated a satyagraha movement for permitting entry to untouchables in the Kalaram temple.

2) Securing Social Justice for Women: Dr. Ambedkar is fondly remembered as a “champion of women rights.” He believed that no human society could progress without the progress of its women constituents.

(a) Dr. Ambedkar formulated the **Hindu Code Bill**. Through this bill, he sought to create a legal framework which would treat women equally as their male counterparts. In matters such as inheritance of property, marriage, divorce, adoption and maintenance the Hindu Code Bill bought women on an equal footing as compared to men. In a way it was the first instance where rights of women were recognized and respected. However, during Ambedkar’s time the bill never saw the light of the day and it was whole-heartedly opposed by those influenced by orthodox Hindu customs and traditions. (through constitutionalism)

(b) Dr. Ambedkar’s opinion on the **Maternity Benefit Bill** is worth mentioning – “It is in the interest of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period and also subsequently, and the principle of the bill is based entirely on that principle.⁴⁰”

(c) He promoted **women’s education** and asked them to observe, reason and oppose, if necessary, those customs and traditions which suppressed the individuality of a woman. Moreover, he advised women to educate their children and to make them ambitious.

(d) Dr. Ambedkar asked women to follow sound social habits i.e. to wear their dress in a different style, to wear light ornaments and to quit consumption of meat.

(e) He encouraged women participation in Mahad Satyagraha for burning the copies of Manusmriti as the text had assigned inferior status to women.

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar was a firm believer in extending equal rights to women. It is vital to fathom that Dr. Ambedkar didn’t fight for improvement in the status of women out of sympathy but because he understood the role of women as agents of social change in a state. According to him, a society which fails to respect its women is bound to regress in every aspect of national life.

3) Improving the Condition of the Worker: Dr. Ambedkar denounced economic exploitation of the worker class. Improving the condition of labour class was always one of his top priorities.

a) In 1936 he had established the **Independent Labour Party**. Its electoral strategy was to unite all minorities and protect labourers from exploitation.

b) Moreover, he even organized a ‘hartal’ to end the exploitation of mill workers in Bombay.

c) Dr. Ambedkar was deeply concerned about **social security of the labourer**. He stressed on the need to come up with a dynamic arrangement dealing with minimum wages and a social security

net for the workers. Deplorable work conditions in various factories disturbed him. He extorted the workers to question the factory owners on such work conditions.

d) Dr. Ambedkar was opposed to the **Industrial Disputes Bill** which prevented the workers from going on strike and validated use of police force against workers.

e) In the field of agriculture, the plight of landless labourer disturbed Dr. Ambedkar. He came up with the **scheme of collective farming** under the supervision of the state to deal with this issue. In Konkan region, **Khoti system of land tenure** existed. Under this system, the tenants worked lifelong without any payment. Dr. Ambedkar worked at abolishing this diabolic system which exploited the tenant.

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar succeeded in his endeavour to empower the labour force in India to demand their rights. “Dr. Ambedkar was an enlightened and vigilant social thinker concerned about the development of all kinds of weaker and vulnerable sections of Indian society and fought for their betterment by awakening and organizing them and by exerting pressure on the Government to enact laws to ensure social justice to them always bearing in mind that the law was the most potent tool of social transformation (*Shabbir 1997*).⁴¹”

(XV) Critical Evaluation

1) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s **thoughts on democracy are quite relevant, logical and rational** to be ignored. Just think of a state of affairs where a person enjoys the fruits of establishing a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity. What if he enjoys these fruits in just one particular aspect of life? And what if, for a person, that particular aspect of life (political aspect) is placed behind the other two relevant aspects of life (economic and social aspects) in his sequence of priorities? **Fundamental rights are of no use to a person who has no economic security.** As Dr. Ambedkar concluded, then, “it would place our political democracy in peril (*Shabbir 1997*).⁴²”

2) Jean Dreze, a leading economist, questions Dr. Ambedkar’s model of democracy – “**There is a hint of the chicken-and-egg-problem here: What comes first, democracy or socialism?**”⁴³ To Dr. Ambedkar, it seemed that socialism would come first and decorate the arena for the reception of democracy. However, in his theory, he had advocated that socialism would be established through an unalterable constitutional law which pre-supposed the existence of political democracy. Moreover, **his idea of “collective farming” lacks viability and is difficult to implement.**

3) Dr. Ambedkar had included “Right to Property” as a fundamental right. To quote Ray and Ray “It is somewhat inconceivable how he could achieve socialism by eliminating socio-economic inequality without undermining the basic economic foundation of society on which the system of inequality was founded.”⁴⁴

4) **India’s policy of reservation** (special safeguards for weaker sections) is based on social status of a person determined by his caste.

Dr. Ambedkar was a proponent of this policy although he asserted it to be a temporary provision. However, its scratchy implementation over the years has raised doubts about its viability. Instead of it attacking the caste system, the policy has further perpetuated caste-based inequalities. The recent

Hardik Patel episode in Gujarat clearly shows the damage this policy has caused. So it is critical to ask: **Will the policy of reservation, advocated by Dr. Ambedkar for social change, be responsible for the blow up of India's political structure?** Moreover, it is imperative to think about it logically. Caste in India has become similar to religion. It is something which cannot be eliminated or “annihilated.” The state should rather move on to a more indicative and quantifiable criteria (such as economic status of a person) in implementing the policy of reservation.

5) Dr. Ambedkar had considered D.P.S.P. (Part IV) to be pious declarations. According to him, the nation must strive to achieve the goals mentioned in Part IV of the Indian constitution. The present status of Part IV of the constitution, being non-enforceable in court of law, makes our constitution in Justice P.N. Bhagwati's words **“like a gun that does not fire (Shabbir 1997).⁴⁵”**

6) **“Bhakti may be road to salvation of the soul; but in politics bhakti or hero worship is a sure road to degradation (Shabbir 1997).⁴⁶”** Dr. Ambedkar's words ring true even today. However, one should be concerned about the God-like status Ambedkar's followers have given to him. Despite his warning, Dr. Ambedkar's supporters have raised him on a pedestal and declared him as the “hero” of the downtrodden masses. **This is very unfortunate.**

(XIV) Conclusion:

Often, **Dr. Ambedkar is portrayed as a Dalit leader** who fought for his community with unmatched alacrity. Of course he did. He gave a section of population in India a worthwhile identity. In doing so he fought for humanity. But in typifying his role as a Dalit leader we often ignore **the great person that he was.** Despite facing social injustice and discrimination multiple times in his life he never advocated a bloody revolution for overthrowing the prevailing social system. He believed in democracy and constitutional means to achieve his end. His clout on the social milieu during his times was such that thousands of supporters would have stood by his course of action. But he chose his course of action wisely. **We should be grateful to Dr. Ambedkar for this.**

Popular literature on Dr. Ambedkar is selective. We just know about the role played by him in drafting the constitution or empowering the downtrodden masses. Nowhere do we find equal mention in the role played by Dr. Ambedkar in setting up the Reserve Bank of India (R.B.I.). He formulated the guidelines and conceptualized the code that would make the functioning of R.B.I possible. Dr. Ambedkar was involved in formulating India's Water Policy as well as planning a “Grid System” for electrifying the nation. Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar played a prominent role in projects of national importance such as the Damodar Valley and the Hirakund River Valley project.

Sanjay Hegde, a Supreme Court judge, beautifully captures the position of Dr. Ambedkar in history of modern India, **“His status in the national pantheon, where he occupies a corner all by himself, and slightly apart from the nationalist heroes of independence, is somewhat like his status in school. He may not have been a hero of the war of Indian independence, but he is the hero who built an independent India. It is time that we cease to keep him ‘slightly apart’.⁴⁷”** (The Hindu)

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