CHAPTER-IV

Gandhi and Ambedkar on Polity
The present chapter deals with Gandhi and Ambedkar’s perception on polity. Polity is unavoidably about power and people, about how power can enable or disable people, how it should be used to make it legitimate and limited. How there can be reconciliation between individual liberty and equality as well as between liberty and authority of the state. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar have answered these questions with different perceptions. It is these perceptions that have been discussed in the present chapter.

The struggle for India’s freedom dominated Gandhi’s public life as the nation was under the alien rule. Political freedom was the pre-requisite for attaining all other freedoms, and it was, therefore, the primary and paramount aim. Gandhi made a fundamental premise that political freedom is the birth right of individuals and nations. In his words, “As every country is fit to eat, to drink and to breathe, even so is every nation fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly.”¹ Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote the freedom to err and even to sin. “If God Almighty has given the humblest of His creatures the freedom to err,” Gandhiji held, “it passes my comprehension how human beings, be they ever so experienced and able, can delight in depriving other human being of that precious right.”² He further said, “Freedom belongs to the very being and nature of man, it is part of his personality and must qualify his

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² Ibid.
work. Without it he can never rise to his full stature. Freedom is the very breath of life.”

Gandhi believed that freedom is not only for one’s own nation, but for all nations on the face of the earth. “If I want freedom for my country,” he said “I do not want that freedom in order that I, belonging to a nation which counts one-fifth of the human race, may exploit any other race upon earth, or any single individual. If I want that freedom for my country, I would not deserve that freedom if I did not cherish and treasure the equal right of every other race, weak or strong, to the same freedom.”

India’s freedom in Gandhiji’s eyes included and symbolized the freedom of all enslaved people. More than once did he declare that his ambition was much higher than achieving independence. Through the liberation of India he sought to deliver the “so called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation.” No man was clearer or more emphatic in his conviction that the so called backward races were as much entitled to be masters in their own houses and makers of their own destiny as the so-called civilized people. Race had nothing to do with the right to be free, as with the right to breathe God’s atmosphere.

The state is continued with three powers, namely, legislative, executive and judiciary. The legislative frames laws, statutes, rules and regulations, the executive implements the laws giving effect to it and the judiciary examines the validity of laws and interprets them. In the modern state the rules framed by it are stated to be supreme.

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 95.
6 Ibid.
Gandhi stated that the will of the individual is governed and limited by the social will which the state represents. Throughout his writings, he emphasized that everyone must be respected as a free moral agent and that violence degraded both its objects and subjects. Non-violence and freedom were the overall goals of his philosophy and democracy was an instrument for attaining these larger goals. Democracy for Gandhi must in essence mean, “The act and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.”

Gandhi considered arbitrary rule antithetical to the goals he had set for himself. He realized that democratic government coupled with an equitable society appeared to offer the greatest prospects to achieving his goals. According to him, democratic rule fostered a diffusion of power and increased the prospects that equality and freedom would be pursued. Democracy, he believed, should be based on consensus and cooperation which transcended the majority principle and pursued the welfare of all.

Gandhi said, “The rule of the majority has a narrow application, i.e. one should yield to the majority in matters of detail. But it is slavery to be amenable to the majority, no matter what its decisions are... Under democracy individual liberty or opinion or action is jealously guarded... what we want, I hope, is a government not based on coercion even of a minority but on its conversion.” According to him democracy as practiced in Britain, was bad because it believed in counting of heads, those who won 51 percent votes carried the day. The minority had to submit to the

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majority. While he believed that consent was the basis of all good
governments, he wished to conceive the ideal state as the rule of selfless
individuals. He dismissed liberal democracy, in which people compete for
their own self-interest.\(^\text{10}\)

Democracy, for Gandhi, was not merely procedural but also
substantive. He complained that democracy had come to mean party rule,
or to be more exact, rule in the hands of the Prime Minister who often
lacked honesty of purpose. In it, he held, each party thrives in horse-trading
and sensationalism which is blown out of proportions by the press.\(^\text{11}\)

Gandhi placed his ideal democracy in the village, where life was
simpler, power diffused and the economy decentralized. Concerning only
what they produced themselves, the villagers would be self-sufficient.
Work in the village would revolve around hand-spun cloth or *Khadi* and
provide everyone with useful labour. Gandhi laid considerable emphasis on
direct labour in the field of handicraft industries and insisted that the
worker must be able to control the machinery and not become so dependent
on mechanized work that he could not earn his livelihood without it.
Gandhi said:

> My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete
> republic, independent of its neighbours for its own
> vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in
> which dependence is a necessity. Thus, every
> village's first concern will be to grow its own food
> crops, and cotton for its cloth. It should have a
> reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for
> adults and children. Then if there is more land
> available, it will grow useful money crops, thus

\(^{10}\) Ronald J. Terchek, “Gandhi and Democratic Theory,” in Thomas Pantham and
Kenneth H. Deutsch (ed.), *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage

\(^{11}\) *Ibid.*, also see V.R. Mehta, *Foundations of Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi:
excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis. There will be no caste such as we have today with their graded untouchability.\(^{12}\)

Gandhi added:

Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons annually elected by a Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.\(^{13}\)

He believed that distribution can be equalized when production is localized, or in other words, when the distribution is simultaneous with the production. By concentrating all activity in the villages, he believed that the means of production of elementary necessities would remain in the control of the masses. The villages would work cooperatively, pooling their labour and goods and dividing their profits. He expected that the competition of capitalism would be replaced by the cooperation in an agrarian-based society in which each village would be largely


\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*
economically and politically self-contained. The village would be locally controlled by the panchayats.\textsuperscript{14}

For him ideal democracy protects and reflects plurality, most especially responding to those who have been excluded in the past. In this spirit, Gandhi says, “This age of awakening of the poorest of the poor is the age of democracy.”\textsuperscript{15} To make it a reality he urged democrats to struggle to make government simple and avoid hierarchy and domination. However, according to Gandhi, even ideal democracy can make mistakes, and he invests his citizen with civil disobedience to confront injustice.\textsuperscript{16}

Important foundation of Gandhian democracy is equality. While talking about equality Gandhi did not mean absolute economic equality which applied to everyone in the same way. At the economic level, according to Gandhi, equality “simply meant that everybody should have enough for his or her needs.”\textsuperscript{17} Although this kind of equality could be achieved through government ownership of all property, but Gandhi rejected centralized power leading to curtailment of individual freedom. For Gandhi, equality should enhance individual freedom, not retard it. Accordingly, he wanted the range of economic differences significantly narrowed.\textsuperscript{18}

In Gandhi’s words:

Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in

\textsuperscript{14} Ronald J. Terchek, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 309.


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{17} Ronald J. Terchek, “Gandhi and Democratic Theory,” \textit{op. cit.}, p. 316.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}
whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor laboring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good. I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have found it worth the effort.¹⁹

Gandhi envisaged trusteeship as a post-capitalist arrangement in order to transform the capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. In his opinion, trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property, except in as much as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.²⁰ This suggests that new Gandhian outlook was of declining to receive what all cannot get.

Gandhi did not believe in the doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. In his words, “I do not believe in the doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. It means in its nakedness that in order to achieve the supposed good of 51 percent the interest of 49 percent may be, or rather, should be sacrificed. It is a heartless doctrine and has done

Thus, in Gandhi’s opinion the only real and dignified human doctrine is the greatest good of all, and this can only be achieved by uttermost self-sacrifice.

Gandhi is for participative or substantive democracy. In his words, “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.” He admitted the need of a central government administration but believed that it should not be modeled after the accepted western form of democracy. Central government administration should not become the bearer of the alienated political rights of the citizens. He said, “Under my plan, the state will be there to carry out the will of the people, not to dictate to them or force them to do its will.”

Although, he did caution people against converting democracy into mobocracy, however, he insisted that democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all. He said, “Most people do not understand the complicated machinery of the government. They do not realize that every citizen silently but nonetheless certainly sustains the government of the day in ways of which he has no knowledge.”

He believed that real Swaraj will come into by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority which it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority. In Gandhi’s words, “Real Swaraj will come not by the

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23 Harijan, March 31, 1946, p. 64 in Ibid., p. 70.
24 Young India, July 28, 1920, p. 4, in Ibid., p. 30.
acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.”

Gandhi, thus, recognized the need for a central government administration but he suggested that it should be structured not as a pyramid but as an oceanic circle. He said:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Gandhi argued that electoral democracies of Europe and America are only “nominal democracies,” belonging to “the same species” as fascism, both are exploitative systems and “resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to encompass their end.” The only differences he saw between liberal democratic and fascist systems were that the violence of the latter was much better organized than that of the former, and that these “have the backing of their people who imagine that they have a voice in their own government.”

Gandhi in fact, through his philosophy, offered guidance in transforming what he called the nominal democracy, of the modern western type into a truer or fuller democracy, which he referred to as Purna

25 Young India, January 29, 1925, pp. 40-41, in Ibid., pp. 4-5.
26 Harijan, July 28, 1946, p. 236, in Ibid., pp. 73-74.
27 Harijan, September 14, 1939, pp. 201-202, in Ibid., p. 78.
Swaraj (complete or integral democracy), Ramrajya (sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority), or Sarvodaya (a social order promoting the good of all), leading to total and integrated progress of the individual ultimately leading to the progress of the whole society.  

Gandhi sought to redeem individual freedom even in the political sphere without endangering social harmony. Gandhi wrote that social life “is not divided into water tight compartments, called social, political and religious” and that “every act... has its... spiritual, economic and social implications.” He referred to his ideal of true democracy as the “square of swaraj”, whose four sides are the political, the economic, the social and dharma (i.e. universal morality).

He believed that the observance of the social norms consciously and as a matter of duty not only was a more secure foundation for social order than their observance for reasons of legality or out of fear of external sanctions but was also conducive to individual freedom. Gandhi said that his conception of true democracy was one of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. He held that by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress man would move in the direction of a truly democratic order.

Gandhi’s true democratic order is based on equal opportunity to all and non-violence. Gandhi believed that India is in the process of evolving true democracy. In his words, “My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never

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30 Ibid.
31 Young India, November 17, 1921, p. 367, in M.K. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 32.
happen except through non-violence.” He further said, “India is trying to evolve true democracy, i.e. without violence. Our weapons are those of Satyagraha expressed through the Charkha, the village industries, primary education through handicrafts, removal of untouchability, communal harmony, prohibition, and non-violent organization of labour as in Ahmedabad. These mean mass effort and mass education. We have big agencies for conducting these activities. They are purely voluntary, and their only sanction is service of the lowliest.”

Gandhi, thus, emphasizes that in democracy, the necessities of life are to be enjoyed by all – the princes, the moneyed men and the poor. Complete self-government (Purna Swaraj), according to him, is an impossibility until and unless all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys, are made available to the poor also. But equality does not mean that all must be provided with palaces, for these are not essential for happiness, equality signifies equal freedom for all in spite of different caste, color and creed. It means equalization of status. To him, there is no difference between the son of a weaver, an agriculturist or of a school master.

Thus, economic equality for him is the master-key to non-violent democracy or independence. It involves abolition of the eternal conflict between capital and labour. He is opposed to a system in which the bulk of the nation’s wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few rich persons while the rest of the society remains below the poverty line. He, therefore, wants the government to intervene in order to provide opportunities to all.

33 Ibid.
34 Harijan, January 15, 1938, p. 416.
Parliamentary democracy is based on the party system since it is virtually impossible without it to organize a large number of voters that the universal adult franchise and direct election involves. At times, Gandhi can be cited as having denounced the political parties and even party spirit prevailing in the modern democratic mechanism. And his statement given before his death has been later interpreted as an indictment on party system since he advised the Congress Party to dissolve itself and convert itself into a “Lok Seva Sangh”. But possibly there was another motive behind this advice. He wanted that Congressmen who had made sacrifices for the attainment of independence must not entangle themselves in power politics, but should be available for the building up of a new society in India. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that he envisages a democratic political order in which political parties will not exist. It is substantiated by this opinion given by him in *Harijan* regarding parties in democracy. He agreed that party workers do become power loving after some time however, non-cooperation with the party in question is not possible in democracy.\(^\text{35}\)

However, it does not mean that he approves of all the evils and ills that prevail in the modern party system. He does not want a party to keep political power as its only end, as to him, political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life. Moreover, to him, service to the people is the sole aim of all collective actions. So, any group or party, according to him, can serve the people even without aiming at capturing the political power or

government. He was sure that one can serve the country even by remaining outside the government.\textsuperscript{36}

Gandhi also challenged the modern bureaucracies that commonly develop in the modern democratic polity in response to popular pressures for state action in providing basic facilities like education, health, sanitation, safe drinking water etc. The citizens want efficiency in the delivery of services, therefore, bureaucracies take on hierarchical forms and assure the fair and neutral application of law. Bureaucratic neutrality emphasizes that officials set aside personal or partisan considerations when they regulate or administer.\textsuperscript{37} Gandhi, however, is suspicious of claims to neutrality that sanction the use of power over others. For him, the partiality of any truth and the criticality of autonomy mitigate against the bureaucratic impulse to classify and categorize individuals. Moreover, Gandhi finds the bureaucratic proclivity to rest on expertise means it does not have to listen but merely applies its version of the truth, for this reason, he wants specialists to stop, listen and be accountable.\textsuperscript{38}

Bureaucracies, according to Gandhi are highly technical affairs and specialists carry a knowledge and competency not available to the lay public. Lacking technical proficiency, ordinary citizens are shut out of the process of policy formation and implementation, and democratic control is undermined. To challenge this tendency, Gandhi seeks to diffuse power and uncomplicate things so that people can take charge of their lives rather than have others take charge of them.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Young India}, August 11, 1921 cited in \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Harijan}, January 11, 1921, cited in \textit{Ibid}.
Gandhi noticed another evil of modern democracy. This is the dominating role that money plays in the elections. In his opinion no organization can properly serve the masses if it relies on money for gaining power.  

Gandhi very firmly believed that the state was an instrument of coercive power and violence was an inevitable phenomenon associated with the state. Gandhi wanted an ideal society devoid of violence, which could be possible only where there was total absence of state and every other form of political organization. In such a society since there would be no state the role of power would be minimal. Gandhi depicted the idea of a society in *Hind Swaraj* where every individual was the master of his own destiny. Each individual was free to the extent that social restraint was marginal in import and significance. This idea has been eloquently expressed by Gandhi on numerous occasions in his long public life. He said:

I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of special progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society, enriches both the individual and the society of which one is a member.  

Here Gandhi sounds like Rousseau who too wants to reconcile the individual freedom with the obedience to the state.

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41 *Harijan*, May 15, 1939, p. 144.
It is in this context that Gandhi at one level conceived of an idealized polity where there would not be any state or government to regulate the right of individuals. This form of polity was termed by him as *Ram Rajya*. The other level of polity was conceived at the sub-ideal level which would have a government that would permit maximum freedom to individuals. These two forms of polity evolved from one into the another involving a movement from the lower to a higher form of democracy. *Ram Rajya* was that stage of development where ethical considerations would govern the life of the individuals. *Swarajya* or self rule or freedom was that stage of development where the people would still feel the necessity of government and state. In a sense, Gandhi’s model of an ideal state involved a movement from the sub-ideal to the ideal.\(^{42}\)

Mahatma Gandhi was of the considered view that social transformation of humanity cannot be attained in social and political vacuum. Although in his first order ideal society, he completely rejected the modern notion of state and power yet he himself admitted that the first order of the ideal society will be attained only after attaining the second order ideal society in which power has very important role to play.\(^{43}\)

He believed that the true power resides in people and not in the governments and legislatures. Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by fear of punishment and second by acts of love. In December 1947, Gandhi told his closest colleagues, the members of Hindustani Talimi Sangh, “By abjuring power and by devoting ourselves to the pure and selfless service


of voters, we can guide and influence them. It would give us more real
to every department of life, political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence, the classical statement of Thoreau that the government is best which governs the least.45

Thus, Gandhi was of the opinion that under a free Government the real power will be held by the people. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village. Thus, there should be complete decentralization of power. The power which originally belonged to the people should be transferred to them. He argued, “The centre of power now is in Delhi or in Calcutta or in Bombay, the big cities. I would have it distributed among the seven hundred thousand villages of India.46 Panchayat Raj is the true democracy and believing this he gave the slogan ‘Back to the Villages’.47 He maintained that every village should eventually become a self-sufficient republic. He was desirous of arranging political power in ever widening circles whose centre will be the individual in which village Panchayat as a primary unit of political power shall play a dominant role.

44 Ibid.
45 Young India, July 2, 1931, p. 162 in M.K. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 28.
47 Harijan, January 18, 1942, p. 4.
Ambedkar, on the other hand, considers the state a very essential political organization as it discharges a number of functions necessary for a civilized and democratic life of the citizens anywhere and all the more so in a society where lawlessness and disorder prevail. According to Ambedkar, the aims of state organization are many and varied. First of all, the state has to maintain the right of every subject to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, free speech and free exercise of religion, in other words, for democracy, happiness and welfare of the people. The second function is to remove social, political and economic inequality by providing better opportunities to the submerged classes. Here the state becomes a positive organization for the protection of the down-trodden. Thirdly, the state is to make possible for every subject enjoyment of freedom from want and fear. Lastly, it has to provide against internal disorder and external aggression.\textsuperscript{48}

Ambedkar, thus, assigns many more significant and positive functions to the state than mere protection of life, liberty and property. He makes the state instrumental in bringing economic changes leading to social changes in society. This is the difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar with respect to their views on state. Ambedkar assigns more functions to the state than Gandhi. However, despite assigning all these functions to the state, he does not consider it omnipotent and absolute. The state must serve the society for which it exists.

Willingness to render obedience to the authority of the state, according to Ambedkar, is essential for the stability of the government. In this context he is near Gandhi as Gandhi also gives importance to willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society. However, Ambedkar, like Gandhi does not believe in civil

disobedience. On the question that should the individual give unflinching obedience even to the unjust orders of the state, Ambedkar answers in negative. For him the state is for the good of the people and the people should not submit to acts of coercion on the part of the state but fight against them, in a constitutional manner. Here lies the difference between the two.

In Ambedkar's words:

The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics. Who can say how the people of India and their parties will behave? Will they uphold constitutional methods of achieving their purposes or will they prefer revolutionary methods of achieving them?...

He further said:

If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.

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Ambedkar believes that political institutions are not bad but it is people who make these institutions good or bad. He says, "the Constitution as settled by the Drafting Committee is good enough to make in this country a start with. I feel that it is workable, it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say, is that Man was vile."^1

Ambedkar, unlike Gandhi, had faith in Parliamentary democracy. Although, the principle of parliamentary democracy enshrined in the constitution was criticized by the Communist Party as they wanted a constitution based upon the principle of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In reply to the criticism Ambedkar said:

I do not say that the principle of parliamentary democracy is the only ideal form of political democracy... what I do say is that the principles embodied in the constitution are the views of the present generation or if you think this to be an over statement, I say that they are the views of the members of the Constituent Assembly...^2

This suggests that according to Ambedkar under the given circumstances parliamentary democracy was considered to be the best option for India as it was based on the consensus of the members of the constituent assembly giving importance to the role of consensus politics in democracy which is lacking in India in the present scenario leading to policy paralysis and retarted economic growth.

^1 Ibid, p. 318.
^2 Ibid., p. 321.
Ambedkar also recommended certain principles for the proper functioning of parliamentary democracy. The first principle as mentioned earlier was to hold on to constitutional methods to achieve social and economic objectives which seems very relevant today in the context of various civil society movements against the government. Although, it is another debate that why these movements are taking place? Whether the government is not able to connect to the people and a vacuum has been created which is being filled by these movements? Another principle that Ambedkar has recommended to observe the caution against hero worship and being complacent with respect to one’s liberties. In his words:

The second thing we must do to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions.' There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.53

Ambedkar's third recommendation is that political democracy should be based on social democracy which means it should be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity that are compatible with each other. In his words:

The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. 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. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union or trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without, fraternity liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things.\(^54\)

Ambedkar here sounds like Gandhi who also said, “The French have a noble motto in liberty, equality, fraternity. It is a heritage not for the French only but for all mankind.”\(^55\)

He, however, acknowledged that in India there is neither socio-eco equality nor fraternity. Rather, there is graded inequality, gap between the rich and poor is very wide and he believed that if this gap is not narrowed down this would be dangerous for political democracy. Those who would suffer inequality would blow up the structure of political democracy. Ambedkar said:

We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in India Society. One of these is equality. 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. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have

\(^{54}\) Ibid., pp. 322-323.

immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.56

He defined fraternity as a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians which gives unity and solidarity to social life. He said that there is absence of this solidarity in India as people are divided into several thousands of castes. This solidarity would be possible only when people have a sense of nation in the social and psychological sense of the word. In his words:

Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians – if Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life. It is a difficult thing to achieve. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing the goal. The realization of this goal is going to be very difficult – far more difficult than it has been in the United States. The United States has no caste problem. In India there are castes. The castes are anti-national, in the first place

56 Ramachandra Guha, op. cit., p. 323.
because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste. But we must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. For fraternity can be a fact only when there is a nation. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.57

Ambedkar stated that "I am no believer in democracy as an ideal to be pursued in all circumstances and all times." He emphatically stated that "democracy must learn that its safety lies in having more than one opinion regarding the solution of any particular problem, and in order that people may be ready to advise with their opinions, democracy must learn to give a respectful hearing to all who are worth listening to."58 Ambedkar, thus believed in respecting the difference of opinion which is the basis of democracy.

Ambedkar has given his opinion with respect to the domain of the centre. He, unlike Gandhi, believed that centralization of power in the centre is inevitable because of the conditions in the modern world. In this respect he has given the example of the government of United States of America, which notwithstanding the very limited powers given to it by the constitution, has outgrown its former self and has overshadowed the state governments. This kind of situation can occur in India also and for that he believed in striking a balance by not allowing the centre to become stronger.59 He said, "We must resist the tendency to make it stronger. It cannot chew more than it can digest. Its strength must be commensurate

57 Ibid., p. 324.
59 Ramachandra Guha, op. cit. p. 318.
with its weight. It would be a folly to make it so strong that may fall by its own weight."60

Ambedkar gave importance to the tolerance of the difference of opinion in democracy. In this context, he is near Gandhi who said, “If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one’s own cause.”61 Gandhi further said, “Evaluation of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the door of reason when we refuse to listen to own opponents, or having listened make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth.”62

This view given by both Gandhi as well as Ambedkar regarding being tolerant of other people’s opinion is very relevant in the contemporary Indian scenario. Both the ruling elite as well as the opponent parties today are intolerant of each other opinions thus leading to policy paralysis.

Ambedkar believed that democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic. People should strive for real democracy which is social democracy. The downtrodden classes must be allowed and encouraged to govern themselves.63 When Ambedkar gave this opinion about democracy as a top-dressing on the Indian soil, under the given circumstances he was right. However, now after more than six decades of Independence the roots of democracy have been relatively strengthened. Consistent efforts are being made to uplift the socially and economically depressed classes by various government policies and

60 Ibid. pp. 319-320.
61 Young India, February 2, 1921, p. 33 in M.K. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 56.
62 Harijan, May 31, 1942.
63 Ramachandra Guha, op. cit. pp. 316-325.
schemes. However, how far these schemes are actually benefitting those for whom they are meant is another serious question posed in the contemporary Indian scenario with rampant corruption and degeneration of moral values. It is in this context that Gandhian values of self-control, truth, *Ahimsa* and *Sarvodaya* are required to give direction to the people.

Seen from this perspective Gandhi and Ambedkar seem to be compatible with each other. If goal of social democracy laid down by Ambedkar is to be realized then Gandhian means are required. Philosophy of these two great personalities, thus, cannot be completely compartmentalized despite their different perceptions regarding certain aspects of society. Ambedkar has emphasized the diffusion of constitutional morality which means ‘paramount reverence for the forms of the constitution’ for the peaceful working of democratic constitution. He also believed that constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. This suggests that even for Ambedkar, like Gandhi politics needs to be related to ethics.

Ambedkar appreciated Harold Laski for his insistence on the moral order as a requirement of democracy. He opined that in the absence of moral order, democracy will go to pieces. It requires a public conscience. According to Ambedkar public conscience means conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer and it means that everybody whether he suffers that particular wrong or not, is prepared to join the aggrieved to secure justice. Thus, he cautioned that with the making of the constitution the task of building a democratic society is not over. The task has only begun and the people have to make ceaseless efforts to accomplish it. To quote him, "A political democracy without an economic and social democracy is an invitation to trouble and

Ambedkar believed that individual freedom can best be protected by the power of the state. According to him, some restraints always become necessary as absolute liberty is impossible in the society. The purpose of the state is to provide opportunities for the enjoyment of all kinds of freedom, social, economic, political and intellectual. A balance between the central authority of the state and the liberty of the individual must be struck. Thus, he has tried to reconcile the two-individual freedom and the authority of the state.

Thus, democracy for him was not only a form of government but a way of life through which social justice could be established. Social justice demands that society should promote the welfare of all and not merely the greatest happiness of the greatest number like utilitarians. Otherwise the interests of the majority might gain precedence over those of the minorities. He could realise the fact that unless the untouchables acquired power, there is no salvation for them. His approach throughout his life towards the problem had been a political one. In this respect Ambedkar's greatest contribution has been that he has successfully tried to make untouchables hopeful and ambitious. They were activated to fulfil the role of a ruling class. He was not content merely with certain civil rights and safeguards, but he made a resolve to raise their political strata to the level of powerful class, which in turn can be instrumental in bringing material progress. This suggests that Ambedkar considered power as a means to
achieve the emancipation and material well-being of all, especially of the weaker sections of the society.

Ambedkar and Gandhiji both were deeply concerned with the task of the emancipation of the depressed classes. Ambedkar emerged on the Indian political scene primarily as a leader of the downtrodden millions. It was his life’s mission to emancipate these oppressed people from whose very ranks he sprung. Mahatma Gandhi’s position in Indian politics as the leading force of the freedom movement was of a different character. His main responsibility and objective was to liberate India from the British yoke. As such he was an emancipator of all Indian population under the political subjugation of the British, though he conceded that the problem of the Harijans was of a special dimension. Gandhi had his own philosophy of life that was predominantly religious.

Gandhi relied on moral strengths and non-violent satyagraha. Ambedkar, however, argued non-cooperation, prima facie looked non-violent but it could be otherwise. He gave an example that if a mother did not kill her child by strangling it but by stopping giving it food, it would mean violence. He decried Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence because it changed over time and then he was facing a choice whether he would like to be known as the leader of India or saviour of the world and he looked opting for the latter.65

Gandhi, however, defended himself against the criticism that he followed non-violence as he had aspired to become a world leader. Gandhi believed that the Congress party as well as Ambedkar understood the meaning of non-violence in a limited perspective, whereas, he used the

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term in a wider perspective. Gandhi said, "Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He, therefore, took to agriculture and depended personally on the mother earth for his food. Thus, from being a nomad, he settled down to civilized stable life, he founded villages and towns, and from a member of a family, he became member of a community and a nation. All these are the signs of progressive ahimsa and diminishing himsa."^^

Gandhi assumed that at the root of the government there are social and moral principles. He gave more importance to duties than to rights. His conviction was that the strength of government was deeply rooted in the people. However, Ambedkar believed that the government could be run smoothly on the basis of constitution and law. He tried to remove the economic and social evils with the device of law. He felt it necessary to claim justifiable share in the political reforms attempted by the British Government. While busy with the drafting of the Indian constitution and Hindu Code Bill he displayed deep insight about law, intelligence, honesty and perseverance.

Ambedkar conceptualized the state in purely functional and instrumental terms. He regarded it an instrument of the social structure and it was because of this that he came to terms more realistically with the Indian reality and assigned primacy to the category of caste in his political theory. Like the liberals, he rejected the absolutist notion of the state but unlike them he made it an instrument of both individual good as well as the collective good.

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Ambedkar located the ultimate moral sanction in the democratically organized political society, especially in its legal instruments. If the state violated the rights of the individuals or groups, according to Gandhiji, people could appeal to the superior moral authority of the community. Ambedkar, however, has no such recourse and believed in solving the issue within the framework of the state and the law. Here again he drew on the classical liberal theory of checks and balances. The mutually checking powers and functions of the executive and the legislature tended to place partial limits on concentration of power and thus increased the possibility of rights being realized. Further, and again following the classical nineteenth century liberal model, Ambedkar assigned the judiciary the responsibility for enforcing justice through law. Therefore, the judiciary as the guardian of the legal order had to be impartial, independent and adequately competent.

In Gandhi’s scheme of things duties have a predominance over the rights of individuals. He departed from the liberal model to the extent that he also referred to the rights of groups within the organized political society. According to him, it is the function of the state to see that these rights were exercised within the limits imposed by the laws of the state. Thus, neither the state nor the individual is absolute, and the two are supposed to check and balance each other through the legal system. He accepted the Gandhian supremacy of society over the state, but he rejected the Marxist commitment to a narrow class orientation and the Gandhian utopianism based on a mythical rural democracy.

Ambedkar had faith in flexible parliamentary democracy as he argued that India must evolve its own parliamentary democracy and its own cure for its problem of inequality. He was for centralized government,
which he felt not only a necessity for Indian democracy but a guarantee of all minority rights. He insisted on a separate and unitary judiciary suggesting his faith in legal redress. He considered individual rather than the village or a group as the unit of the government. Gandhi, on the other hand, gave a vision of a village oriented decentralized polity ruled by selfless individuals. He, unlike Ambedkar, believed in limited state as Ambedkar assigned significant and positive role to the state as an important instrument in bringing economic changes leading to social changes in society. However, both Gandhi and Ambedkar considered willing submission to social restraint essential for the stability of the polity. Gandhi always insisted that citizenship must always be tied to concrete responsibilities. Gandhian state is a form of society characterized by self-rule and self-regulation.

Thus, Ambedkar’s vision of polity is pragmatic and Gandhian vision retains its utopian flavor.