POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF AMBEDKAR

In this chapter an attempt is made to analyze the political philosophy of Ambedkar.

Ambedkar belonged to the liberal political tradition; he was no philosopher of political radicalism and had no sympathies for revolutionary path in politics. He was an uncompromising individualist conditioned in the legacy of J. S. Mill. Self-government was no mere transfer of political power from the colonial establishment; it was to be attained by facilitating a share for the excluded sections in the operation of the instrumentality of the state, which means political empowerment of the depressed classes. This is made amply clear by him by observing that, "we must abandon the bloody method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha when we can have constitutional methods for achieving social
and economic justice, - these are to be abandoned, these methods are nothing but the grammar of anarchy\textsuperscript{1}.

Ambedkar attached considerable significance to political power proper, for the plight of the depressed classes can be overcome only by their concerted political action by placing themselves as a third force between the Congress and the Socialists. Along with India gaining dominion status, Ambedkar was concerned with the sharing of political power between the depressed classes and the others in the proposed plan. Thus, the problem of the depressed classes was described as predominantly a political one rather than a social one. Protection of the depressed classes could be ensured only by the scheduled castes placing themselves as a third or fourth party between the British colonial state, Indian society and the Muslims. Stressing on the necessity for politics of acute

\footnote{1 Ambedkar, B. R., Dr., Quoted in, Iyer, Krishna, Justice, 'Social Justice and the Undone Vast'. B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1991, p-7.}
bargaining, he expressed as, "Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention"\textsuperscript{2}.

To carry forward his platform of social justice, he adopted well-defined strategies. So long as Britishers remained in power he demanded constitutional rights and safeguards from the colonial state, also, in the post-independence era he collaborated with the centers of power to extract concessions. Along with this, he employed pressure tactics and threats of pulling the depressed classes out of the Hindu polity. He regarded political power as the key to all social progress. The dominant sections in society apportioned economic and social power in their favour by virtue of their access to political power. In his opinion, "political power in this

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{2} Round Table Conference, First Session, 12.11.1930 to 19.01.1931, Proceedings, pp-123-129.}
country has too long been the monopoly of a few and the many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey.  

Ambedkar visualized a limited role for the state and political organization in society. Limited sovereign power for the state and limited authority therefrom for the Government was his prescription. Choice of social organization was the domain of the people and Constitution was never expected to spell out the nature of social organization to be adopted. Legal sovereign power shall be limited; people shall be the ultimate sovereign. He observes that, "Beyond doubt, the sovereignty rests with the people". Unlimited sovereign power of the legislature, too, was not desirable, and it shall not enjoy the privilege to prescribe and determine the administrative set-up, administrative set-up shall be defined by the Constitution itself to avoid tampering by all-powerful legislative body. An over-riding state dominating over society was not acceptable to

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Ambedkar. In his learned opinion, "The state has to provide against internal and external aggression". No mystic personality was to be attributed to the state, he held that it was people who made the state and latter had no existence without the former. Hence, state was held to be a means for an end. It is not absolute and final, it is only a human institution meant for providing happy life, and stability of the state shall rest on deference and sympathy.

Equally he was opposed to the idea of civil disobedience. To him, "To believe in civil disobedience is to believe in anarchy". Balance between authority of the state and liberty of the individual was his concern. Individual freedom shall not adversely affect the best interests of society, but he never allowed state totalitarianism under the pretext of


protecting social interests. Rejecting Machiavellian statecraft, he wanted dignity of the individual and organizational power of the state to go in harmony. State shall be moral and social in character, it shall fulfill the practical needs of its members. Keeping away from class conflicts, state shall devote promote the socio-economic, political and spiritual standards of the masses. A proper comprehension of the village power structure where the untouchables had no decisive say was in the full know of Ambedkar. Hence, he wanted not the village community but the individual to be the basic unit of Indian polity. This is amply reflected in the Constitution of India, where in the ordering of the political structure individual is placed at the base, then the State and finally comes the Center. A plural polity with all diverse manifestations was his vision. Not equalization of income and socialization of property but equality of opportunity, civic, social and political was his forte. State is a device for preventing injustice, oppression and tyranny; individuals are to enjoy certain inalienable, natural, inherent rights. These rights are to be protected by conscience of society, not by law, for if rights are suppressed by society no laws, no parliament, no judiciary can protect them.
The notion of fundamental rights finds its full acceptance in the political perception of Ambedkar. He stood for a free play of rights, but riders were, of course, attached along with rights for preventing the state from prescribing arbitrary limitations and also for restricting the dominant classes in society from unbridled enjoyment resulting in the depriving of even minimal rights to the depressed classes. It was fine balancing in a complex situation, where an over-developed state in an under-developed society with graded inequalities of ascending order of reverence and descending order of contempt was the reality. The fear of incorporated fundamental rights impeding social welfare and social justice through social legislation was the reason for prescribing a body of well-limited fundamental rights. In his view and in the schemes that he worked out he was buttressing the rights of the individual through judicative power guided by the principle of 'due process of law'. He realized that the peculiar situation in Indian society requires a fine balancing of individual liberty and social control, then only social justice could be secured. In this context, he observed that, "we are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which, is so full of
inequalities, discriminations and other things which conflict with our fundamental rights. These ideas of Ambedkar revolve around the notion that individual has certain non derogable rights that cannot be violated and abridged, state shall not infringe these rights, and it shall prevent injustice, tyranny and oppression. Judiciary was treated as the protector of the basic rights of the people and he was for arming the judiciary with extensive writ jurisdiction in the manner of the prerogative writs under the English Law. This will prevent the legislature from violating or abridging the fundamental rights of the people. He was of the view that given the structural peculiarities of Indian society unlimited legislative power will result in the downtrodden being suppressed and manipulated by the better off sections in society; both in respect of economic and social standing of these groups. Equally, Ambedkar feared that village would kill the individual. This is the reason for the Constitution of India adopting individual as the unit, not the

village. Since the village scene is dominated by the dominant castes it is bound to cause an authoritarian socio-cultural milieu, which is the sore of a village. In the village, power-structure the untouchable had no share; hence, to him the basic unit of Indian polity was not to be the village community, but the individual. This is how he expressed himself on this, "...I am therefore surprised that those who condemn provincialism and communalism should come forward champions of village. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the draft constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit."

Liberty, equality and fraternity with fair mix of liberal philosophy and less of verbal socialism were the political strands of Ambedkar. It had no propensity to class war and single party democracy, nor the all-dominant state was to lead society and social life in all its multifarious expressions. His

preference was for equality of opportunity, social, civic and political, rather than state sponsored equalization of income and socialization of property. The trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity were held to be the three pillars of democracy, and this trinity should be seen a unity in itself, not to be seen separately. All these three ideals are to be stressed equally and should be brought into effect at all the three levels of society, economy and polity. These notions were employed and interpreted by him in the context of colonial exploitative arrangement and caste oppression. So these ideals had a liberative dimension in the scheme of Ambedkar. Prof. Upendra Baxi observes as, “It is this total programme of societal transformation which constituted his conception of ‘Swaraj’. Swaraj was not just freedom (from the British); it was just' freedom”

Social engineering through the laws of the state and related structural arrangements formed a cardinal point in the political philosophy of Ambedkar. Constitution shall not remain strictly a legal practice alone; it shall not be concerned about the technical details of law alone. It shall also proclaim the fundamental socio-economic counterparts of the political setting. He made his vision express thus, "but if democracy is to live up to its principle of one man one value the laws of the constitution should not only prescribe the shape and form of the political structures but also must prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society"[10]. His perception of 'rights' was addressed to the civil society rather than to the state. Even the dominant colonial state was allowed the freedom of intervention in social affairs, in his explanation of rights. This was due to the social contradiction in force. The 'right' of the dispossessed people becomes a duty of the colonial state, and also 'cultural reformation' becomes a duty of

the state. While participating in the debates on Hindu Code Bill in Parliament he opined that, "the state has as retained all along in Article 25 of the Constitution the right to interfere in the personal law of any community in this country". Ambedkar wanted to make the socially suppressed (so economically and politically as well) section a "ruling race". It was the approach of political power to be used as a medium for socio-economic control, to use state as an instrument of socio-economic change or restructuring. The social engineering aspect is made clear by him when he says that, "in our judgment, the directive principles have a great value for they lay down that our aim is economic democracy. Because we did not want merely a parliamentary form of Government to be instituted through various mechanisms provided in the constitution, without any direction as to our economic ideal as to what our social order ought to be, we deliberately included the directive

principles in our constitution". He had tremendous faith in law as a means for social management and rule of law was regarded as the best guarantee in this regard; social justice and peace emanate form the body of laws; so much was his faith in the efficiency of legal canons. So vital role was assigned to a formal, rational, legal code in terms of maintaining individual dignity, freedom, class relationship and social harmony. It is very evident when he all along stood for propelling the untouchables to the political orbit by cooperating, if not fully collaborating, with the imperial state, and socio-religious issues were sought to be taken up later. He held that government should have the primary aim of promotion of good of all, especially the downtrodden through a proper system of law and administrative structures. In his view, "good Government means good laws and good administration. This is the essence of good government, nothing else can be." 

Parliamentary form of government which is based on discussions and, hence, very open, was his preference at the structural level of the polity, also it is known to Indian Society from ancient time onward. It ensures transfer of power from one section of the community to another, through free and fair periodic elections, in a peaceful way without bloodshed. Equal was his commitment to representative government along with responsible government. This was essential for protecting the basic human rights of the dispossessed, stress on stability alone was found to be inadequate in the Indian context, so stress was on responsibility of the executive to the legislature. He was no votary of Communism. But he preferred parliamentary democracy along with state socialism regulated by the law of the Constitution. He held that, "it is only by this that we can achieve the triple object; namely to establish state socialism, retain parliamentary democracy and avoid dictatorship"14. This approach overwhelmingly favours state,

law and the economy, through an arrangement, to promote social progress and solidarity. Thus, we may note that adult franchise; religious awakening and social reform were the basis of his thought process. Ambedkar was a firm believer of British liberalism and parliamentary system, his favourite thinker was Edmund Burke, his liberalism was linked to radical rationalism and his ethics was utilitarian; any political proposition was weighed by its usefulness in establishing equitable social order. Periodic renewal of the confidence of the people in the elected representatives was held to be a must for rendering acceptance and legitimacy to the lego-constitutional system. Social consequences of political structures were very decisive, so there was need for combining good government with self-government. Thus, he observed that, "efficiency combined with selfish class interest instead of producing good government is far more likely to become an engine of suppression to the servile classes".  

Abiding faith in democratic order forms the core of Ambedkar's political perspectives and prescriptions. A man of law, he was against the employment of lawlessness for the acquisition of rights, democracy can never be equated with license. Social injustice was to be fought fully by subscribing to constitutional methods, organized mass violations and disobedience of law was alien to his political ideas. Political democracy was required to be backed up with requisite socio-economic measures. He observed that, "state socialism is essential for the rapid industrialization of India, private enterprise cannot do it and if it did, it would produce the inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe and which should be warning to India"\textsuperscript{16}. Ambedkar subscribed to social democracy; his method was legal-political, and he discounted caste exclusivism. The emancipatory overtones of his approach is well made clear by Justice Krishna Iyer in the following words, "his life was a flaming

forge, his commitment was to free the ancient unfree, his economics, law and politics were welded into a Constitutional militancy and geared into a social emancipation movement"17.

The ideals of democracy, liberty and individual rights and also the dignity of the individual at the socio-economic planes were very dear to Ambedkar. He held poverty, illiteracy and caste distinction as positive dangers to democracy. Democracy was described as a mode of associated living. He defined democracy as, "a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed"18. Democracy was defined more as a process in which the basic minimum requirements of a settled peaceful life were assured to each and all without undue privileges for some and discriminations for a vast number. In his learned opinion, "A democratic


society must assure a life of leisure and culture to each one of its citizens.19 Hence, in democracy there can be no isolation and exclusiveness causing the privileged and the under-privileged. Democracy was, thus, regarded as a social ideal and a political method both. Ambedkar visualized the success of democracy in India depend upon satisfaction of the millions of people who were devoid of preliminaries of life. To him, "But we cannot forget that people including the Depressed Classes, do not live on law and order. What they live on is bread and butter."20 Stressing on the social base, content and context of a democratic order Ambedkar explained that a legislative state and static society cannot exist together; he held that social legislation is the sure remedy for social morbidity and for proper effective mobilizations in a democratic order. In the


opinion of Ambedkar, "those who hold that democracy need be no more than a mere matter of elections seems to make three mistakes".

In the opinion of Ambedkar, multiplication of political parties with diverse objectives and opposite political creeds will emaciate the polity. His concern was whether the parties would place the country above their sectarian creed or the other way round, jeopardizing the very freedom of the country. He made his opinion express as; "it is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposite political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creeds or will they place creeds above the country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above the country, our independence will

21 Ambedkar, B. R., Dr., Quoted in Moon, Vasant (Ed)., "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches" - Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1979, Vol. 4, p-282
be put in jeopardy a second time and probably lost forever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood*22. Since despotism was the end result of the party system, even of party dominance, which is antithetical to freedom, Ambedkar stoutly opposed these. And, in his opinion, for democratic government to be truly democratic there shall be two parties, a ruling and an opposition. He observes, "unless we retrieve the situation by the formation of an opposition party there will be no democracy in the real sense of the word"23. One party government was held to be totalitarianism, it is anarchy by lawless rulers, anarchy for the despotism of lawless crowd, both negating humanitarian society and government. To Ambedkar, "in anarchy and dictatorship liberty is lost"24. Any kind of authoritarian despotic

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political doctrine and practices were not acceptable to him. Ambedkar opposed all forms of totalitarian systems and ideology. So he denounced communism. On this, his attitude is reflected in the following, "the Scheduled Caste Federation will not have any alliance with the party like the Communist party, the objects of which are to destroy individual freedom and parliamentary democracy and substitute in its place a dictatorship".  

Ambedkar did not approve violation of laws or violence in political process. Constitutional methods and democratic decorum always formed a part of his political armour. Trade unions and their militant methods were bound to be unsuitable for effecting social changes. Equally, the Communists through their violent course of action cannot bring in social equality by terminating untouchability and other attendant evils. This was the firm belief of Ambedkar. The method of the Communists

25. Ambedkar, B. R., Dr., in Election Manifesto, All India Scheduled Castes Federation, New Delhi, October 1951, p-55.
causing enmity and antagonism and adopting the path of violence and annihilation of opponents was vehemently denounced by Ambedkar. This was because violence once resorted to will perpetuate violence and cause whole scale destruction. Inspired by the democratic temperament of Buddhism; the modes of persuasion, love and sympathy appealed more to him. He made a distinction between absolute non-violence and relative violence, the latter is a means whereas as the former is the end. Ambedkar was a firm believer in constitutional methods and he repudiated bloody, violent, revolutionary means, he counted Satyagraha and non-cooperation as grammar of anarchy. At the same time there was a fair mix of idealism and pragmatism in Ambedkar. This is evident when he says that, "... the law should be non-violence wherever possible; violence wherever necessary" 26.

Politics of reconciliation and unification had enough space in the scheme of Ambedkar. Bargaining on the basis of

caste-mobilization and demands for separate treatment in sharing power were only temporary means for him. In his speech in the Constituent Assembly, New Delhi on 17 December 1946, he pronounced as, "I have not the slightest doubt about the future evolution of the social, political and economic structure of this country. I know, today, we are divided politically, socially and economically. We are in warring camps and I am probably one of the leaders of a warring camp, with all this, I am convinced that given time and circumstances, nothing in the world will prevent this country from becoming one, and with all our castes and creeds, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we shall in some form be united people."27 This political optimism is a part of his approach and divisions of any kind in society reflecting into politics was treated as a transient phenomenon; it is bound to contribute to the positive consolidation at the political level in

the long run. Hence, he never wanted to detach the depressed sections from the national mainstream. Separate electorate, reserved constituencies and refuge under Buddhism were only means for him to attain the desired goal of an integrated political order with no caste, creed and racial discrimination. Primary stress was on result-oriented action within a time frame, and he never wanted rigid political mobilization by the scheduled caste fully alienating themselves from other segments in the polity. Ambedkar was fully conscious of the fissiparous pulls in Indian political order; and he never endorsed politics based on the narrow necks of caste and creed. He stood for national unity, integration and consensus on basic issues and problems.

Ambedkar held that India could be one and an integrated existence can be attained, strongly denouncing the colonial policy of 'Divide-and-Rule' he held one language, one way of life and one religion as the pillars of nationalism. Treating the unification of Indians as vital and most essential, he criticized the conversion of provinces into separate nationalities as self-defeating. This would promote separate
identity of provincial nationalities. Isolated provincial cultures will get crystallized, hardened and solidified. Regarding the pleas for provincial autonomy he expressed that, "to allow this is to allow the provinces to become independent nations". Ambedkar was ready for compromises and he longed for an integrated society where the hitherto oppressors and oppressed will live amicably, so he insisted constitutional safeguard for the downtrodden, he never advocated a breakup of society and polity. His ideal was a multi-coloured social spectrum, an integrated society and full national integration. To ensure this at the politico-administrative levels, Ambedkar prescribed a federal polity with full division and devolution of powers. A balanced federation of states of equal size and strength (of population) was shown as the model. He envisaged a United States of India with two federations of the states of South and North and a confederation of the North and South federations. This was essential for preventing disintegration and balkanization.

At the levels of political strategy, Ambedkar was probing for the ways to juxtapose the untouchables as a separate group in the contradiction between the colonial state system and the struggle for freedom. Bargaining was more with the nationalist movement and he demanded favours from the colonial establishment. Thus, he spoke that, "Attempts to uplift my community rather than win the swaraj for the nation is my goal".

Instead of "Quit India", Ambedkar pleaded for 'New India'. He visualized placing the untouchables as a third force between Hindus and Muslims and also between the Nationalist movement and British colonial state. It was adopted as a strategy to take advantage of the schism between the nationalist movement and colonial establishment. He believed that social justice would be channeled through political

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mobilization and here a 'pressure group' role for untouchables between the alien power and mainstream nationalist movement was his strategy and approach. In fact, he had full faith in the effectiveness of the colonial state system. Ambedkar observed as, "the untouchables see no reason why Indians should start with complete distrust of the British intentions"^30.