

PROSPECTS OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA



The subject assigned to me is, 'What are the prospects of democracy in India?' Most Indians speak with great pride as though their country was already a democracy. The foreigners also, when they sit at a dinner table to do diplomatic honour to India, speak of the Great Indian prime Minister and the Great Indian Democracy.

From this, it is held without waiting to argue that where there is a Republic, there must be democracy. It is also supposed that where there is Parliament which is elected by the people on adult suffrage and the laws are made by the People's Representatives in Parliament elected after every few years, there is democracy. In other words, democracy is understood to be a political instrument and where this political instrument exists, there is democracy.

Is there democracy in India or Is there no democracy in India? What is the truth? No positive answer can be given unless the confusion caused by equating democracy with Republic and by equating democracy with Parliamentary Government is removed.

Democracy is quite different from a Republic as well as from Parliamentary government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society.

What does the word 'Society' connote? To put it briefly when we speak of 'Society', we conceive of it as one by its very nature. The qualities which accompany this unity are praiseworthy community of purpose and desire for welfare, loyalty to public ends and mutuality of sympathy and co-operation.

Are these ideals to be found in Indian Society? The Indian Society does not consist of individuals. It consist of an innumerable collection of castes which are exclusive in their life and have no common experience to share and have no bond of sympathy. Given this fact it is not necessary to argue the point. The existence of the Caste System is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.

Indian Society is so embedded in the Caste System that everything is organised on the basis of caste. Enter Indian Society and you can see caste in its glaring form. An Indian cannot eat or marry with an Indian simply because he or

she does not belong to his or her caste. An Indian cannot touch an Indian because he or she does not belong to his or her caste. Go and enter politics and you can see caste reflected therein. How does an Indian vote in an election? He votes for a candidate who belongs to his own caste and no other. Go into the field of industry. What will you find? You will find that the topmost men drawing the highest salary belong to the caste of the particular industrialist who owns the industry. The rest hang on for life on the lowest rungs of the ladder on a pittance. Go into the field of commerce and you will see the same picture. The whole commercial house is one camp of one caste, with no entry board on the door for others. Go into the field of charity. With one or two exceptions all charity in India is communal. If a Parsi dies, he leaves his money for Parsis. If a Jain dies, he leaves his money for Jains. If a Marwadi dies, he leaves his money for Marwadis. If a Brahmin dies, he leaves his money for Brahmins. Thus, there is no room for the downtrodden and the outcastes in politics, in industry, in commerce, and in education.

There are other special features of the Caste System which have their evil effects and which militate against Democracy. One such special feature of the Caste System lies in its being accompanied by what is called 'Graded Inequality'. Castes are not equal in their status. They are standing one above another. They are jealous of one another. It is an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. This feature of the Caste System has most pernicious consequences. It destroys willing and helpful co-operation.

Caste and class differ in the fact that in the Class System there is no complete isolation as there is in the Caste System. This is the second evil effect in the Caste System accompanied by inequality. This manifests itself in the fact that the stimulus and response between two castes is only one-sided. The higher caste acts in one recognised way and the lower caste must respond in one established way. It means that when there is no equitable opportunity to receive the stimulus from and to return the response from a different caste, the result is the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. The experience of each party loses its meaning when the free interchange of varying modes of life experience is arrested. It results into a separation of society, into a privileged and a subject class. Such a separation prevents social endosmosis.

There is a third characteristic of the Caste System which cuts at the very roots of democracy. It is that one caste is bound to one occupation. Society is no doubt stably organised when each individual is doing that for which he has aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others; and that it is the business of society to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use. But there is in a man an indefinite plurality of capacities and activities which may characterise an individual. A society to be democratic should open a

way to use all the capacities of the individual. Stratification is stunting of the growth of the individual and deliberate stunting is a deliberate denial of democracy.

How to put an end to the Caste System? The first obstacle lies in the system of graded inequality which is the soul of the Caste System. Where people are divided into two classes, higher and lower, it is easier for the lower to combine to fight the higher, for there is no single lower class. The class consists of lower and lowerer. The lower cannot combine with the lowerer. For the lower is afraid that if he succeeds in raising the lowerer, he may well himself lose the high position given to him and his caste.

The second obstacle is that, the Indian Society is disabled by unity in action by not being able to know what is its common good. Plato has said that the organisation of society depends ultimately upon knowledge of the end of existence. If we do not know its end, if we do not know its good, we shall be at the mercy of accident and caprice. Unless we know the good of the end, we have no criterion for rationally deciding what the possibilities are which we should promote. Question is, can the Indian Society in its caste-bound state achieve what is the ultimate question? We come upon the most insuperable obstacle that such knowledge is not possible save in a just and harmonious social order. Can there be a harmonious Social Order under the Caste System? Everywhere the mind of the Indians is distracted and misled by false valuations and false perspectives. A disorganised and factional society sets up a number of different models and standards. Under such conditions it is impossible for individual Indians to reach consistency of mind on the question of caste.

Can education destroy caste? The answer is 'Yes' as well as 'No'. If education is given as it is today, education can have no effect on caste. it will remain as it will be. The glaring example of it is the Brahmin Caste. Cent per cent of it is educated, nay, majority of it is highly educated. Yet not one Brahmin has shown himself to be against caste. In fact an educated person belonging to the higher caste is more interested after his education to retain the Caste System than when he was not educated. For education gives him an additional interest in the retention of the Caste System namely by opening additional opportunity of getting a bigger job.

From this point of view, education is not helpful as a means to dissolve caste. So far is the negative side of education. But education may be solvent if it is applied to the lower strata of the Indian Society. It would raise their spirit of rebellion. In their present state of ignorance they are the supporters of the Caste System. Once their eyes are opened they will be ready to fight the Caste System.

The fault of the present policy is that though education is being given on a larger scale, it is not given to the right strata of Indian Society. If you give education to that strata of Indian Society which has a vested interest in maintaining the Caste System for the advantages it gives them, then the Caste System will be strengthened. On the other hand, if you give education to the lowest strata of Indian Society which is interested in blowing up the Caste System, the Caste System will be blown up. At the moment the indiscriminate help given to education by the Government and American Foundation is going to strengthen the Caste System. To make rich richer and poor poorer is not the way to abolish poverty. The same is true of using education as a means to end the Caste System. To give education to those who want to keep up the Caste System is not to improve the prospect of Democracy in India but to put our Democracy in India in greater jeopardy.

- B. R. Ambedkar

About the Essay

In this essay, Ambedkar discusses the social reality of India and raises the question whether democracy can succeed in India which is rooted in the caste system. He stresses the point that being a republic or having a parliamentary government does not necessarily mean that we are a democratic country.

He describes democracy as 'a mode of associated living' among the people of a society and regrets the fact that Indian society is badly divided between upper and lower castes which leads to hatred and contempt between people. Every sphere of life, industry, commerce, politics, even charity has been influenced by caste divisions. The caste system divides people into masters and slaves, and that destroys sympathy, harmony and cooperation between people of upper and lower castes. Till the caste system is abolished, there can be no real democracy in India.

Ambedkar suggests that education can help solve this problem to some extent. If the lower strata of society are enlightened by giving them education they will resist the caste system. However, education for the privileged upper classes does not help, as after getting education they become interested in retaining the caste system which offers them greater opportunity of better jobs, and this poses a threat to the success of democracy in India.

The author of the essay Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of Indian constitution, launched a crusade against untouchability. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1990.

GLOSSARY

prospects : possibilities, chances of being successful

assigned	:given
diplomatic	: relating to diplomacy, i.e.,management of international relations
adult suffrage	:the right to vote for all adults
equating	: treating as equal or similar
connote	: suggest or imply
praiseworthy	: deserving praise or admiration
mutuality	: doing or feeling the same for each other
innumerable	: so many that cannot be counted
exclusive	: limited to one group; not shared.
denial	: refusal to allow
ideals	: high standards of perfection
embedded	: fixed firmly
hang on	: struggle to hold on to
rung	: the short bars that form the steps of a ladder
the lowest rungs of the ladder	: the remaining people struggle to hold on to the lowest positions in the industry.
pittance	: a very small allowance of money
charity	: giving help, money, food, etc. to the needy
communal	: belonging to a community; here it means charity is given with the community's considerations in mind.
downtrodden	: oppressed
outcastes	: persons who have no respectable place in society as others refuse to accept them
militate against	: make it less likely to succeed
ascending	: moving up (higher castes have hatred for lower castes)

descending	: climbing down (lower castes are treated with contempt)
contempt	: scorn; a strong feeling of dislike
pernicious	: harmful, destructive
isolation	: separation (from others)
stimulus	: something that arouses activity or acts as an incentive
equitable	: fair, just
arrested	: stopped or interrupted
privileged	: enjoying special advantage, opportunity or honour
subject class	: the class under the power or control (of the privileged class)
endosmosis	: passage of a fluid inwards through a porous septum or partition; here it means merging of different strands of society.
occupation	: a job or profession
stably	: firmly, not likely to change or become weak
aptitude	: natural ability or skill
progressively	: steadily, gradually
stratification	: restricting or limiting (the opportunities of growth to a particular level or class of society)
stunting	: preventing or stopping from growing or developing properly
deliberate	: intentional or planned
obstacles	: obstruction
disabled	: unable to function properly
end	: aim, purpose
accident	: chance or unexpected happening
caprice	: a sudden change of attitude or behaviour

distracted	: attention gets diverted
criterion	: a standard by which something can be judged or decided
factional	: divided into different groups
rationality	: logically, reasonably
caste-bound	: conditioned or restricted by the caste system
valuation	: deciding the value
insuperable	: a problem that is so great or big that it cannot be overcome or defeated
save	: except
perspectives	: ways of looking at or considering something
consistency	: agreement, not changing (one's mind)
retention	: keeping or continue to have
dissolve	: to end
solvent	: a liquid in which solids dissolve or get absorbed
rebellion	: organized resistance
strata	: social levels
blowing up	: destroying
indiscriminate	: done without (careful) thought and planning
abolish	: to end officially
in jeopardy	: in danger of being damaged or destroyed

Activity 1: COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative :

- 1) Dr. Ambedkar defines democracy as :-
 - a) an associated earning
 - b) a mode of associated living
 - c) a campaign
 - d) a charity shop

- 2) Dr. Ambedkar says that –
- caste system be abolished
 - caste system be safe guarded
 - caste system be replaced by Vyavastha
 - religion has no place in democracy

B. Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each :

- How does Dr. Ambedkar describe democracy?
- Why does Dr. Ambedkar express doubts about India's democratic system?
- How does Dr. Ambedkar describe the existence of caste system in India?
- How is the caste system against true democracy?
- How can education help in destroying the caste system?
- What does Dr. Ambedkar mean by 'a democracy is more than a form of government'?

C. Answer the following questions not exceeding 60-80 words each:

- What are the evil effects of the caste system and how do these stand in the way of democracy?
- What are the various obstacles in the way of ending the caste system? What remedies does Dr. Ambedkar suggest to abolish the caste system?
- Are the observations of Dr. Ambedkar about the caste system in India still relevant today? What remedies would you like to suggest to end the caste system?

D. Say whether the following are True or False. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false in the bracket:

- Dr. Ambedkar says that the roots of democracy are to be traced in social relationship. []
- Dr. Ambedkar suggests that education can solve the problem of untouchability. []
- Dr. Ambedkar says that democracy can succeed only in those countries which are rooted in caste system. []
- Graded inequality, says Dr. Ambedkar, is a part of caste system. []
- Dr. Ambedkar believes that Indian society is disabled by unity in action. []

Activity 2: VOCABULARY

A. Match the words in column A with those in column B

A	B
downtrodden	very small money
pittance	fair or just
equitable	oppressed
Adult suffrage	refusal

denial
deliberate
pernicious

the right to vote for all adults
intentional
harmful

B. Change the following into adjectives by adding a suitable affix –
Praise, Faction, Progress, Assign, Parliament

C. The word ‘innumerable’ as used in this lesson also, means ‘countless’.
There are other words such as numerous, many, several, various, etc.
Explain their difference of meaning by using them into sentences.

Activity 3: GRAMMAR

Sequence of Tenses

A sentence can contain a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. When the main verb or a sentence is in a past tense, verbs in subordinate clauses are also normally in a past tense.

Study the box below:

Tense of verb in main clause		Tense of verb in subordinate clause
Present	He thinks that she will come.	Future Simple
Past	He thought that she would come.	Conditional
Present	He sees that he has made a mistake.	Present Perfect
Past	He saw that he had made a mistake.	Past Perfect
Present	I work so hard that I am always tired.	Present
Past	I worked so hard that I was always tired.	Past
Present Perfect	He has done all that is required.	Present
Past Perfect	He had done all that was required.	Past
Present	He says that he is going to meet her.	Present continuous
Past	He said that he was going to meet her.	Past continuous

However, when the subordinate clause expresses a universal truth, the verb is in present tense form –

The Preacher said that God exists.

The teacher said that the earth moves round the sun.

Now do the exercises given in your grammar book.

Activity 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY

Dr. Ambedkar's role as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee can hardly be exaggerated. Discuss amongst the groups Dr. Ambedkar's contribution in framing the Indian constitution.

Activity 5: COMPOSITION

1. India is the largest democracy of the world. In democracy, the importance of voting can hardly be exaggerated as it decides the destiny of a democratic nation. India as a nation suffers from some severe ills which are certainly the obstacles to establish a democracy Gandhiji dreamt of. One such obstacle is the caste system. Write an essay pointing out the ills of caste system which seems to have played havoc with Indian polity.
2. You will agree that the maker of a democratic nation is its voter. If he/she abstains from voting, it is unlikely to establish democracy to the root. Therefore, don't you think that voting must be made mandatory? Write an essay expressing your ideas as to why voting be made mandatory.