



Mains Marathon

Day 54: In religion, Bhakti may lead to spiritual salvation, but in politics, Bhakti or Hero worship leads to degradation and eventually authoritarianism. Comment. (150 words)

02 Sep 2022 | GS Paper 4 | Theoretical Questions

Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Introduce the concept of hero worship in politics briefly.
- Discuss the negative effects of hero worship in politics, comparing them with democracy.
- Give a fair conclusion.

Answer:

A strong democracy is built on strong institutions. Individual political leaders may have great achievements and great claims regarding their actions but lack the checks and balances built in democratic processes.

It is in this context that Ambedkar warned against Bhakti or hero worship of individuals in politics and emphasized institutional democracy.

Harmful effects of Bhakti worship or Hero Worship:

- **Lack of Accountability:** In democratic systems accountability of leaders is important; however, hero worship of a leader reduces the willingness and ability of people to question the leader. Any reasonable question is seen as disrespectful to the leader personally, effectively undermining the checks and balances built in through rule of law.
- **Subversion of institutions:** John Stuart Mill argued “not to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enables him to subvert their institutions”. A powerful leader who is blindly trusted by his followers can effectively subvert the institutions like judiciary, civil services, and independent election machinery without raising eyebrows because of blind trust the followers put in him. This situation leads to dictatorship.
- **Compromise the role of opposition:** Opposition in democracy is axiomatic, without opposition true democracy cannot exist; this is true in case of opposition within parliament as well as opposition in form of dissent by civil society or individuals through free speech. Hero worship threatens the role of opposition. Any opposition to a venerated leader is met with threats harming the role of opposition and dissent.
- **Absolute power corrupts absolutely:** Absolute power wielded by an individual enjoying the blind faith of followers leads to corruption as the institutional checks are missing and accountability is not fixed for the actions of venerated leaders.

- **Threat to internal party democracy:** Inner party democracy is essential for larger democratic process in a democracy, e.g., individuals with right credentials may get to contest election if there is inner party democracy. On the other hand, an unquestionable leader is likely to make those people contest the election, which will perpetuate his rule, the public good will not be his priority.

Ambedkar's warning was issued to protect the independence India had achieved after long struggle. The Bhakti or hero worship in politics is road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship and will be a threat to independence even though not in form of colonialism, but eventual curtailing of fundamental rights which forms building blocks of independence.

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