



## Democratic Vision of Ambedkar

**For Prelims:** Ambedkar, Buddha, Kabir and Mahatma Phule

**For Mains:** Democratic Vision of Ambedkar

### Why in News?

Several studies have examined Dr B.R. Ambedkar's concept of democracy, primarily through the lens of social, political, and economic philosophy.

### What Constitutes Democracy in Ambedkar's Opinion?

#### ▪ **Morality:**

- A look at the [Buddha](#) and his Dhamma sheds light on how [Ambedkar viewed democracy as an approach that affected every aspect of human existence.](#)
  - Buddha, [Kabir](#) and [Mahatma Phule's](#) philosophies played an important role in Ambedkar's own engagement with democracy.
- According to him, **democracy must also be viewed morally** despite its pillars of equality, liberty, and fraternity.
- **Use of Morality in Caste System:**
  - **Ambedkar used the lens of morality in investigating the caste system**, the Hindu social system, the nature of religion and Indian history.
  - Since Ambedkar brought the most marginalized communities into democracy, it was difficult to place his framework of democracy within these rigid religious structures and socio-political systems.
  - Thus, Ambedkar attempts to construct a new structure based on the principles of Buddhism.

#### ▪ **Balancing Individualism and Fraternity:**

- He was **critical of extreme individualism that was a possible outcome of Buddhism**, as such characteristics failed to engage in activism that challenged social order.
  - Thus, he believed that **there needed to be a balance between individualism and fraternity for a harmonious society.**

#### ▪ **Importance to Practicality:**

- Ambedkar gave **utmost importance to practicality.**
- For him, **concepts and theories needed to be tested** as they were supposed to be practised in society.
- He used **rationality and critical reasoning to analyse any subject matter**, because he believed that a subject must first pass the test of rationality, failing which, it must be rejected, altered or modified.

### What are the Types of Morality?

#### ▪ **Social Morality:**

- According to Ambedkar, **social morality was built through interaction and such**

**interaction was based on the mutual recognition of human beings.**

- Yet, under the rigid systems of caste and religion, such interaction was not possible as one did not accept another person as a respectable human being due to their religion or caste background.
- Social morality was **based on equality among human beings and a recognition of respect.**

▪ **Constitutional Morality:**

- Constitutional morality for Ambedkar was a **prerequisite to maintaining a system of democracy in a country.**
  - Constitutional morality means adherence to the core principles of constitutional democracy.
- He believed that only through a negation of hereditary rule, laws that represented all people, with people's representatives and a State which has the confidence of the people, can democracy be maintained.
- One single person or political party could not represent the needs or will of all the people.
- Ambedkar realised that the **caste system did not go hand in hand with such an understanding of moral democracy.**
  - This was because the **traditional caste structure was of a hierarchical rule,** with no mutual respect among individuals, and complete subjugation of one group by another.

## What is Ambedkar's view of Indian society?

▪ **Caste System:**

- According to his analysis of Indian society, the **caste system is a particularistic value in Hinduism.**
  - Particularism is a **political theory where one group promotes its own interests** without regard to the interests of larger groups.
- The upper castes, according to Ambedkar, **universalise the negative particularity** (their dominance over the other groups) and particularise the negative universal morality (wherein the caste system and the subsequent alienation of certain groups is justified).
- This negative social relation is essentially 'undemocratic'.
- It is to fight such separation that Ambedkar attempted to bring the democratic processes of Buddhism into the discourse of modern democracy.

▪ **Role of Religion in Democracy:**

- In Ambedkar's view, **democracy was born from religion**, without which associated living was impossible.
- Thus, **instead of removing aspects of religion completely**, he attempts to reconstruct a new version of democracy that accepts the democratic aspects of religions like Buddhism.
- Finally, **Ambedkar realises that in order to conceptualise democracy as a way of life**, it was important to distinguish principles and rules in society.
- In the Buddha and His Dhamma, Ambedkar elaborates how the concepts of Dhamma, which includes Prajna or thinking and understanding, Sila or good action and finally Karuna or kindness, emerge as a **'morally transformative' concept that dismantles regressive social relations.**

## What are the Conditions put forward by Ambedkar for Democracy to Function?

▪ **Tackling Inequalities in Society:**

- There must not be any glaring inequalities in society and there must not be an oppressed class.
- There must not be a class that has got all the privileges and a class that has got all the burdens to carry.

▪ **Strong Opposition:**

- He emphasized on the **existence of a strong opposition.**

- Democracy means veto power. Democracy is a contradiction of hereditary authority or autocratic authority, where elections act as a periodic veto in which people vote out a government and opposition in parliament act as an immediate veto that curbs the autocratic tendencies of the government in power.
- **Liberty:**
  - Additionally, he argued that **parliamentary democracy instills a passion for freedom**; freedom to express thoughts and opinions, freedom to live a respectful life, freedom to do what one values.
  - But we can see a **parallel fall of India in the Human Freedom Index along with a weakened opposition** and consequently falling democratic credentials.
- **Equality in Law and Administration:**
  - Ambedkar also upheld equality in law and administration.
  - **Likes should be treated likely and there should be no discrimination** based on class, caste, gender, race and so on.
  - He brought forward the idea of constitutional Morality.
    - For him, the constitution contains only the legal skeleton, but the flesh is what he calls constitutional morality.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Years Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. Which of the following parties were established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar? (2012)**

1. The Peasants and Workers Party of India
2. All India Scheduled Castes Federation
3. The Independent Labour Party

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (b)**

- The Peasants and Workers Party of India was formed by Keshavrao Jedhe of Pune, Shankarrao More and others in 1947. Hence, 1 is not correct.
- All India Scheduled Castes Association was established by B. R. Ambedkar in 1942 and this party participated in general elections in 1946. Hence, 2 is correct.
- Independent Labour Party (ILP) was also formed by B. R. Ambedkar in 1936, which participated in the provincial elections of Bombay. Hence, 3 is correct. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.

### Mains

**Q. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, despite having divergent approaches and strategies, had a common goal of amelioration of the downtrodden. Elucidate. (2015)**

**Q. Constitutional Morality' is rooted in the Constitution itself and is founded on its essential facets. Explain the doctrine of 'Constitutional Morality' with the help of relevant judicial decisions. (2021)**

**Source: TH**

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