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## Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Democracy and Social Justice

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### ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution is built on the fundamental principles of democracy and social justice. Through the Constitution, India has sought to eliminate the historically entrenched caste-based inequalities and to build a society founded on equality. The Constitution strives to uphold the dignity of the individual and reject caste-based dominance through democracy. Furthermore, the architecture of the Constitution ensures that democracy does not succumb to the power of the majority. As a result, a parliamentary democracy centered on the individual was established, as the Preamble of our Constitution demonstrates. The purpose of this research is to determine whether emphasizing democracy's significance is necessary for the establishment of social justice. This study will attempt to comprehend the topic, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's concept of the prerequisites for a successful democracy and the interrelationship between democracy and social justice. The methodology of qualitative research will serve as the foundation for this study.

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### Introduction

Discrimination based on caste, religion, gender, and economic status affects people all over the world. These divisions have resulted in an unequal social system. A sense of injustice and alienation stem from inequality, which in turn perpetuates social and environmental imbalance. The roots of such



inequality are not natural but man-made. The privileged classes, including the nobility, the ruling elite, and those who benefit from power and influence, shape and sustain these actions. Consequently, exploitation systems continue to grow and vested interests resist social change. Various ideological bases like fate, past sins and virtues, merit, caste, gender, and religion are used to justify this cycle of exploitation. Exploiters attempt to legitimize an oppressive and unfair social order in this manner. In this context, injustice is frequently mistaken for justice. As a result, it is critical to investigate this man-made system of exploitation. This exploitation directly affects social justice because it is rooted in human society. It becomes necessary to determine how social justice can be established on the basis of the value principles of democracy.

In order for governance to truly be inclusive, many definitions of democracy place an emphasis on the representation, participation, and cooperation of the common people. A fundamental question arises from this: in the context of democracy, who are "the people?" This question becomes even more important in a society divided by inequality: who exactly are the people? There are two parts to the answer to this question: the powerless and the powerful. Can true democracy be established in an environment of inequality? Dr.B.R.Ambedkar to answer this question, based his concept of democracy on the three fundamental principles of equality, fraternity, and liberty. In a speech he gave in 1952 at the Pune District Court Library, Ambedkar outlined seven necessary conditions for a functioning democracy. The purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between the concept of social justice and each of these seven conditions.

### **The Concept of Justice**

The word "justice" comes from the Latin word "Justitia," which comes from the word "iustus," which means "just" or "right." Various philosophical perspectives have shaped the idea of justice. The Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato regarded justice as a fundamental social virtue. In *The Republic*, Plato explores the meaning of justice through a dialogue between Cephalus, Polemarchus, Glaucon, and Thrasymachus.

1. According to Cephalus, justice means speaking the truth and repaying one's debts.
2. Polemarchus was of the opinion that doing the right thing involves helping friends and hurting enemies.
3. Thrasymachus argued that justice is merely the stronger's interest.



Through these discussions, Plato proposed specialization and intervention as two aspects of justice. Later, Aristotle, Plato's disciple, developed the theory of distributive justice, which posits that the state ought to fairly distribute goods, services, honors, and positions among citizens. However, because his concept of fairness was based on individual virtue, society was divided into "virtuous" and "non-virtuous" groups. Thus, Aristotle rejected absolute equality and proposed proportional equality instead. The Greek understanding of justice emphasizes fairness, rule of law, rationality, and equality of rights for all, regardless of class, gender, race, or caste.

In 1840, Western intellectual Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio coined the term "social justice" for the first time. Later, in his book *La Costituzione Civile Secondo la Giustizia Sociale*, published in 1848, Antonio Rosmini-Serbati elaborated on the idea. The idea was further developed by John Rawls in his seminal work *A Theory of Justice*, where he formulated the concept of "justice as fairness."

### **Social Justice in the Indian Context**

According to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, liberty, equality, and brotherhood are the foundations of social justice. Democracy is founded morally and philosophically on these three principles. J. Mill's definition of democracy differs from that of liberal and Western democratic thinkers, who frequently referred to it as "the rule of the majority" or "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." These ideas were criticized by Mill, who referred to them as false democracies that suppress minority rights. Mill emphasized representative democracy and the protection of freedom of speech and expression as essential elements of true democracy.

Similarly, Lord Bryce emphasized participation and deliberation in his description of democracy as a "government by discussion." It was famously described by Abraham Lincoln as "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Dr. B.R. Ambedkar elaborated on these concepts, defining democracy as "a way of life" rather than just a form of government. He believed that revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people could — and should — be achieved peacefully, through democratic means.

Democracy has the potential to bring about inclusive and comprehensive social change through such peaceful transformation, ultimately eradicating the deeply ingrained inequality that exists in Indian society. In ancient India, rights were often reserved for a privileged few, while duties were imposed on the majority through religion, policy, and punishment. Inequality was institutionalized by this structure. Discrimination became normalized, and certain groups faced systemic exclusion. Therefore, it is essential



to comprehend and apply the seven conditions that Dr.B.R.Ambedkar for the successful establishment of democracy — conditions that aim to secure equality, fraternity, and justice for all.

## 1. No Glaring in Equalities

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar says that, a successful democracy cannot exist in a society marked by glaring inequalities. In society, there should be no discrimination or exploitation. A truly democratic society must be free from systems of privilege and oppression, where no class enjoys special rights or bears unequal burdens. Extreme inequality can lead to social unrest and even violent revolution, making democracy impossible to maintain. While analyzing this condition made the observation that the Vedic religious system is the primary source of inequality in India. The word Varna comes from Sanskrit, while the term caste was later derived from the Portuguese word *casta*. According to the Vedic tradition, the Smritis and Puranas denied equal fundamental rights to all castes, thereby creating a rigid and inhumane caste-based hierarchy. In this system, a person was born into a caste and was stuck there all their life, so there was no room for mobility or the creation of a new social order based on equality and justice. By granting special privileges to the Brahmin caste and relegating the Shudras and Atishudras to the lowest social status, only fit for manual labor, the Vedic religion rejected the idea of social justice. The majority of people were denied access to education, employment, and self-respect by this caste system. Dr. Ambedkar identified this ancient system of unequal rights and responsibilities as a major obstacle to India's democratic development. A large segment of society, being excluded and oppressed, became a serious hindrance to the realization of social justice.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar emphasized that social justice can only be achieved when all people have equal rights and opportunities and glaring disparities are eliminated through this first condition. In this regard, his ideas echo those of Karl Marx, who argued for the abolition of classes to create an equal social order. Similarly, as J. S. Mill defined democracy, it must ensure equal opportunities and equal space for all citizens.

## 2. Existence of Opposition

According to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, social justice is achieved through the operation of the state. The opposition party and the ruling party are the two fundamental pillars upon which democracy is built. If either of these pillars weakens or collapses, the entire edifice of democracy is endangered. In an election that is free and fair, the people's support for both sides is crucial to their strength. The opposition is treated with dignity and respect in established democracies like Canada and England. The Leader of the



Opposition is granted an official status, government salary, and staff. The opposition's role is not merely to criticize the government but to scrutinize, question, and guide it toward better governance and necessary reforms.

Social justice in a welfare state is only possible with a strong and responsible opposition. The opposition acts as the voice of marginalized and vulnerable groups, representing those who are excluded from the benefits of state programs and policies. The opposition draws attention to the inequality that persists in society by bringing to light the injustices and inequalities that are perpetrated by the ruling elite. As a result, the opposition becomes a protector of democratic fairness and the oppressed's voice. It exposes cases of discrimination and demands corrective action from the government. The existence of a vocal and effective opposition increases the likelihood of achieving social justice for all and strengthens democracy in this way.

### **3. Equality in Law and Administration**

Equality before law and in administration is one of the most fundamental conditions for the success of democracy and the realization of social justice. In a democratic system, every citizen, regardless of caste, religion, gender or economic status, must be treated equally before the law. No one ought to be exempt from the rule of law, and no one ought to be denied access to the law because of their social status or political power. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar emphasized that administration must be free of political influence and remain impartial. When the machinery of administration becomes influenced by political motives or favoritism, it leads to corruption, discrimination, and the denial of justice to weaker sections of society. Therefore, there must be a clear distinction between political offices, which are subject to electoral accountability, and civil offices, which are meant to implement laws and policies in an impartial manner.

In a democracy, the rule of law is the cornerstone of justice. It ensures that power is exercised within legal and moral limits. Legal equality ensures that even the most marginalized individuals can seek legal and administrative justice and protection. Citizens gain confidence in democratic institutions and prevent the concentration of power in a few hands when the administrative system operates fairly. Legal and administrative equality has a transformative effect from a social justice perspective. It ensures that laws are not used as instruments of oppression and shields marginalized and vulnerable communities from exploitation. When the administration functions impartially, it acts as a bridge between the ideals of democracy—liberty, equality, and fraternity—and their realization in everyday life.



Therefore, equality in administration and law is not only a legal requirement but also a moral tenet of democracy. It ensures that social justice becomes a real thing rather than just a promise made in the constitution, fosters equity in government, and increases public trust in the state.

#### **4. Constitutional Morality**

The concept of constitutional morality was introduced by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar by, who emphasized that the Constitution is not only a legal document but also a living guide to democratic conduct. He stated, "The Constitution is only a skeleton; constitutional morality must find the flesh and blood of that skeleton." Ambedkar was implying that, despite the fact that the Constitution provides the legal framework—the rules, rights, and structures of governance—the moral spirit and ethical commitment of the people as well as their leaders are what give democracy its life and meaning. Even the well-drafted constitution can fail to uphold democratic principles or deliver justice. Constitutional morality is essential. Ambedkar warned that the people should keep in mind why the Constitution was created. India's Constitution was enacted not to abolish one form of rule but to abolish hereditary monarchy and dictatorship and to establish a system of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. The objective was to ensure that every citizen could equally participate in governance and that no class or individual could hold absolute power. Constitutional morality functions as the system's soul in a democracy. Even when one holds political power, it requires adherence to democratic principles, tolerance of dissent, and respect for the rule of law. Leaders and citizens alike must act with restraint, respect constitutional limits, and prioritize the welfare of the people over personal or partisan interests.

From the perspective of social justice, constitutional morality ensures that the rights enshrined in the Constitution—especially equality before the law, protection against discrimination, and the right to dignity—are not treated as mere words but are actively realized in practice. It safeguards the interests of marginalized and vulnerable groups by reminding those in power of their moral duty to promote inclusivity and fairness.

As a result, constitutional morality transforms the Constitution from a legal structure into a moral and social mission, bringing democracy and social justice together. It ensures that democracy functions not only through institutions but also through the ethical behavior and sense of justice of the people who uphold it.



## **5. There is no majority rule.**

When there is a tyranny of the majority in legislatures, there can be no true democracy. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar firmly believed that democracy is not merely the rule of the majority, but the protection of the rights of all, especially those belonging to minority and marginalized communities. In a just society, every citizen—majority or minority—must feel free, safe, and respected.

Democracies become majoritarian dictatorships when the will of the majority is used to silence, oppress, or ignore the voices of the minority. The weaker or smaller sections of society are denied the opportunity to complain or seek justice in such a system. Frustration, alienation, and social conflict result from this, which eventually weakens the democratic system as a whole. Ambedkar believed that equality, respect for one another, and safeguarding one's dignity were more important aspects of democracy than the power of numbers. A healthy democracy ensures that the majority governs with moderation and fairness, taking into consideration the minority's rights and interests. The majority has a moral obligation to defend the rights and opportunities of those without power or privilege. This tenet is extremely significant from a social justice standpoint. Minorities—whether defined by caste, religion, gender, language, or economic condition—must have equal access to justice, representation, and participation in decision-making. Every citizen can contribute to nation-building without fear or discrimination in a democracy that becomes inclusive rather than exclusive by protecting their rights. Therefore, democracy thrives only when it respects diversity and guarantees justice for all. In any democratic society, the absence of majority tyranny is not only a political necessity but also a moral foundation for social justice and a prerequisite for true equality.

## **6. The Functioning of Moral Order in Society**

The functioning of a moral order is essential for the success and stability of any democracy. “The moral order is always taken for granted in democracy,” as political philosopher Harold Laski observed. In other words, citizens and leaders alike must act with a sense of moral responsibility for democracy to survive. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar also emphasized that democracy is not merely a political system but a way of life based on ethics, respect, and social responsibility. Democracy gradually loses its purpose and descends into chaos or authoritarianism if there is no moral foundation in society. Unfortunately, this moral decline can be observed in many modern societies, including our own, where political competition often replaces ethical conduct with personal or party gain.



People have freedom in a free government, but freedom without moral restraint can be destructive. Therefore, moral values must guide both citizens and the state. If the people do not have a common understanding of what is right and wrong, laws will not be able to sustain democracy on their own. Laski made the point that, although the moral order in a democracy is frequently assumed, it must be consciously maintained. A moral society provides the ethical foundation upon which laws are built. It establishes the fundamental standards by which the state's actions are evaluated, including justice, equality, and dignity. A state that violates these moral principles, even under the cover of legality, loses its democratic legitimacy. As a result, the state's power must always be limited, and justice must take precedence over mere authority. From the perspective of social justice, the moral order ensures that the state does not become an instrument of exploitation or oppression. It reminds citizens and rulers of their moral obligation to uplift the marginalized, protect the weak, and promote equality. A morally guided democracy aims not only to maintain political order but also to create a just and humane social order, where every individual's dignity is respected.

As a result, the moral foundation of social justice and the moral foundation of democracy are based on the functioning of moral order in society. Without it, freedom loses meaning, and democracy degenerates into mere power politics. As a result, the foundation of a truly democratic and just society must be based on moral principles, social responsibility, and a dedication to achieving justice for all.

## **7. Consciousness in Public**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar regarded public consciousness as one of the most vital conditions for the success of democracy and the realization of social justice. He illustrated this through the example of the Jewish struggle for liberation, which succeeded because of a strong and united public awareness. This public consciousness refers to the collective moral awakening of society — a shared sensitivity that becomes agitated at every act of injustice, no matter who the victim is.

Public consciousness means that citizens do not remain silent spectators to oppression or wrongdoing. It exemplifies a spirit of solidarity in which individuals unite to fight for justice even when they are not directly impacted. A society with a strong public conscience cannot tolerate discrimination, exploitation, or inequality in any form.

In the context of democracy, public consciousness forms its moral and emotional foundation. Democracy can function only when people are aware, alert, and ready to question injustice. They hold the government accountable and ensure that power is not misused when citizens develop a collective



sense of right and wrong. Without this awareness, democracy descends into elections and procedures devoid of moral purpose, becoming mechanical. Public awareness is just as important from a social justice perspective. It ensures that injustices faced by marginalized or oppressed groups are not ignored or normalized. Societal protests against inequality on the basis of caste, class, gender, or religion help to tear down oppressive structures and establish a more equitable system. Dr. B. R Ambedkar envisioned a society in which everyone cared about the suffering of others. The essence of public consciousness is this shared moral obligation. It transforms democracy from a system of governance into a community of compassion and equality, where justice is not just a legal ideal but a lived reality for everyone.

As a result, public consciousness fosters empathy, collective responsibility, and the courage to confront injustice wherever it occurs, bringing democracy and social justice together. A democracy rooted in such public morality becomes not only politically strong but also socially just and humane.

## Conclusion

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's vision of democracy goes far beyond the mere mechanics of elections, majority rule, or institutional procedures. He emphasized that true democracy is a way of life, grounded in the moral and ethical principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The seven conditions he outlined—absence of glaring inequalities, existence of a strong opposition, equality before law and administration, constitutional morality, prevention of majority tyranny, functioning moral order, and active public consciousness—serve as essential pillars to ensure that democracy is meaningful, inclusive, and just.

Each condition directly contributes to social justice. Eliminating inequalities ensures that no individual or group is systemically disadvantaged. A strong opposition holds power accountable and protects marginalized voices. Equality before law and impartial administration guarantee that justice is not selective but universal. Constitutional morality instills ethical governance, while moral order ensures that citizens and rulers act responsibly. Protecting minorities from the tyranny of the majority preserves dignity and fairness, and public consciousness fosters empathy, collective responsibility, and societal vigilance against injustice.

Together, these principles create a democracy that is not only political but moral and social, where the rights of every individual are respected, social inequalities are addressed, and opportunities for human development are universal. Dr. B. R Ambedkar's framework reminds us that democracy and social justice are inseparable: one cannot exist meaningfully without the other. In essence, a society that



upholds these conditions transforms governance into a force for equality, compassion, and human dignity, fulfilling the true promise of the Constitution.

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