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)**

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