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## **BLOCK 2 POLITICAL INSTITUTION**

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Unit 5 Electoral Democracy and Party System

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Unit 6 Parliamentary Democracy

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## UNIT 5 ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AND PARTY SYSTEM

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### Structure

- 5.1 Objectives
  - 5.2 Introduction
  - 5.3 Democracy
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### 5.1 OBJECTIVES

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This unit would enable you to understand:

- the basic concept of democracy;
- Ambedkar's view on democracy;
- Ambedkar's idea of electoral democracy and political representation; and
- Ambedkar's view of the party system.

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### 5.2 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units we have learnt about the political vision of B. R. Ambedkar. He made a significant contribution in nation building and his writings covered a wide range of social, political and economic issues including state, democracy, capitalism, political parties and the caste system. This unit focuses on his views on political institutions, particularly electoral democracy and party system.

Ambedkar's political ideas, including that on democracy, were always contextualized in reference to India, where social conditions were peculiar and different from other parts of the world. He therefore had very rightly pointed out that the existence of democracy along with the "graded inequality" of the caste system in the Indian society was very difficult. For Ambedkar, inequality was not even half as dangerous as "graded inequality".

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### 5.3 DEMOCRACY

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To understand Ambedkar's views on electoral democracy and party system, it is important to understand his views on democracy. Ambedkar viewed democracy, i.e. self government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as a form of government

that should go beyond simple constitutional morality. He believed that the maintenance of a constitutional form of government is not the same thing as self-government by the people. He also felt that granting adult suffrage was an essential condition for the formation of a government of the people in the logical sense of the phrase. But it cannot by itself be said to bring about a democratic government, in the sense of the government by the people and for the people. According to Ambedkar, there are some fundamental concerns that are important to understand democracy, ignoring which would lead democracy to peril. He classifies these concerns in the following order:

- 1) There is a need to recognize that in every country there exist two classes – the governing class and the servile class between whom there is a continuous struggle for power.
- 2) By reason of its power and prestige, the governing class finds it easy to maintain its supremacy over the servile class.
- 3) That the adult suffrage and frequent elections are no bar against governing class reaching places of power and authority.
- 4) That on account of their inferiority complex, the members of the servile classes regard the members of the governing class as their natural leaders and the servile classes themselves volunteer to elect members of the ruling classes as their rulers.
- 5) That the existence of a governing class is inconsistent with democracy and self-government and where the governing class retains its power to govern, it is wrong to believe that democracy and self-government have become realities of life.
- 6) That self-government and democracy become real not when a Constitution based on real suffrage comes into existence but when the governing class loses its power to capture the power to govern.

Thus, according to Ambedkar, unless all these concerns are met and are in the knowledge of every citizen of the country, democracy cannot be achieved. The principle aim of the constitutional framework of democracy should be to dislodge the governing class from its position and to prevent it from remaining as a governing class. The setting up of a democratic government cannot be a matter of dogma and neither can the processes by which the governing classes obtain their mastery over the servile classes be uniform. This is what democracy means and involves. Constitutional morality, adult suffrage and frequent elections as the be-all and end-all of democracy, as understood by the western thinkers, are only a superficial understanding of democracy. Those who accept this view are nothing but endorsing the view of the governing classes, who know by their experience that such mechanisms have not proved fatal to their power and their position. Indeed, these have helped to give to their power and prestige, the virtue of legality and made them less vulnerable to attack by the servile classes.

Explaining the Indian context, Ambedkar said that India has a system where the ruler and the ruled are so complexly graded that it creates a system of “graded inequality”. It is a situation in which the aggrieved parties are not on a common level - there are the ‘highest’ (the Brahmans), below the ‘highest’ are the ‘higher’ (the Kshatriyas), below them are those who are ‘high’ (the Vaishyas), below the ‘high’ are the ‘low’ (the Shudras) and below them are the ‘lowest’ of the low (the Untouchables). All have a grievance against the ‘highest’ and would like to bring about their downfall. But they will not get together.

The 'higher' is anxious to get rid of the 'highest' but does not join hands with the 'high', the 'low' and the 'lowest', lest they should reach his level and be his equal. The 'high' wants to over-throw the 'higher', who is above him, but does not want to join hands with the 'low' and the 'lowest', lest they should rise to his status and become equal to him in rank. The 'low' is anxious to pull down the 'highest', the 'higher' and the 'high' but he would not make a common cause with the 'lowest' for fear of the 'lowest' gaining a higher status and becoming his equal.

In the system of graded inequality there is no such class as completely unprivileged class except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the 'low' is a privileged class as compared to the 'lowest'. Each class being privileged, is interested in maintaining the system.

Hence Ambedkar was very perturbed as to how such a society based on "graded inequality" would accept the idea of democracy which is based on principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. If the dynamics of social relationships are based on equality, it could foster democracy but when social dynamics cultivate "graded inequality", how could it accommodate the characteristics of democracy? Perhaps this was the central question in Ambedkar's mind while India was going to usher in democracy through application of universal franchise.

For Ambedkar, social and economic equality was prior to political equality. Denying social and economic equality, in Ambedkar's view, would always lead democracy to contradiction. We can address this contradiction by changing the social and economic structure and ensuring social democracy which would promote a culture of "ideal society" where all individuals would exercise equal rights and allegiance toward society and nation.

For pursuit of such an ideal society, Ambedkar insisted that democracy should not merely be a form of government; it should be a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen. And for that he very categorically suggested that all religious texts like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Shastras* and *Smritis* that had been sanctioning a social system which perpetuated "graded inequality" and were hence against the ethos of democracy, should be done away with. Ambedkar's pursuit was to democratize society by throwing it open to all.

Ambedkar believed that every Indian must give a new doctrinal basis to one's religion – a basis that will be in consonance with liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, democracy. He did not see democracy merely as a political machine. It was even more than a social system. It was an attitude of mind or philosophy of life where liberty, equality and fraternity become the deepest concern. If in a democracy, liberty does not destroy equality and equality does not destroy liberty, it is because the basis of both is fraternity. Fraternity is therefore, at the root of democracy.

### **5.3.1 Critique of Parliamentary Democracy**

Ambedkar was a staunch critic of parliamentary democracy. His criticism of parliamentary democracy was based on his knowledge of western democracies. Despite the fact that parliamentary democracy had all the marks of a popular government, revolts in the western world were happening within a century of democracy's universal acceptance and inauguration.

In Ambedkar's view, parliamentary democracy had actually failed. Explaining the same, he found that one of the prime reasons of the failure of parliamentary democracy is that it never took notice of economic inequalities and did not care to examine the impact of the freedom of contract on the parties to the contract, in spite of the fact that they were unequal in their bargaining power. It did not mind if the freedom of contract gave the strong the opportunity to defraud the weak. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs unto the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class.

He said that parliamentary democracy fails to 'realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy'. He believed that social and economic democracies are the tissues and the fiber of a political democracy. The tougher the tissues and the fiber, the stronger is its body. Democracy means equality, but parliamentary democracy has developed a passion for liberty over equality. It has failed to realize the significance of equality, and does not even endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality. It is due to this that liberty has swallowed equality and has left a progeny of inequities in parliamentary democracies.

He maintained that parliamentary democracy in reality has never been a government of the people or by the people. It has been rather a government of a hereditary subject class by a hereditary ruling class. It is because of this that parliamentary democracy has not fulfilled the hopes it held out to the common man of ensuring to him liberty, property and pursuit of happiness.

### 5.3.2 Social Democracy

As stated earlier, for Ambedkar, social and economic equality came prior to political equality. He believed that any democratic form of government presupposes democratic form of society. The formal framework of democracy will be of no value and would indeed be a misfit if there is no social democracy.

Social democracy involves two important things:

- 1) an attitude of mind, an attitude of respect and equality towards their fellows, and
- 2) a social organisation free from rigid social barriers.

Democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness that results from the distinction between the privilege and the unprivileged. It is therefore needed that to actually realize democracy, we must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at its base, social democracy. Democracy merely as a matter of adult suffrage and frequent elections seems to be based on three mistakes:

- thinking that government and society are distinct and separate;
- failing to realize that a government is to reflect the ultimate purposes, aims, objectives and wishes of society; and
- failing to understand that government would be good or bad, democratic or undemocratic depending to a large extent on the instrumentalities, particularly civil services on which everywhere governments have to depend for administration of law.

It all depends upon the social milieu in which the civil servant is nurtured. If the social milieu is undemocratic the government is bound to be undemocratic.

Thus, if you nurture the mental disposition of an individual as democratic, then the government would naturally be democratic. If not, just being democratic in structure, governments may easily become a dangerous form of government. A government for the people assumes individual attitudes must be democratic, meaning each individual is prepared to treat every other individual as equal and is prepared to give the same liberty to the other as he claims for himself.

The soul of democracy is the doctrine of one man, one value. But restricting this doctrine to mere political structure is a grave mistake. Democracy demands that each individual shall have every opportunity for realizing its worth. It also requires that each individual shall know that he/ she is as good as everybody else. Political democracy rests on four premises:

- 1) that the individual is an end in himself/ herself;
- 2) that the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him/ her by the Constitution;
- 3) that the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his/ her constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege; and
- 4) that the State shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.

However, to ensure social democracy, the state needs to go beyond these four principles and ensure constitutional protection to the downtrodden classes. Ambedkar also wanted that the state to ensure constitutional safeguards to protect the minorities from the tyranny of Hindu Communal Majority. And for that, he demanded three layers of constitutional safeguards:

- 1) guaranteed minimum representation in the legislature;
- 2) guaranteed minimum representation in the executive; and
- 3) guaranteed minimum representation in the public services.

For Ambedkar, social democracy was as vital as political democracy in India, which in simpler words meant recognizing liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. He, therefore, speaking on the occasion of the adoption the Constitution in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949 said,

On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy.

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## 5.4 ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

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We have seen how Ambedkar was critical of parliamentary democracy and argued for transforming the political democracy into social. His ideas on electoral democracy and party system also have to be understood in a similar context. For Ambedkar, elections and party systems were tools of representation in a democracy. In this section we will understand about his ideas of representation.

Elections in India were introduced by the British even before independence, much before India adopted the democratic framework of government. It was a mechanism to ensure representation of Indians in the legislative bodies. However, as explained earlier, since society in India was based on a system of “graded inequality”, Ambedkar was very critical of its representative character. The British government had introduced ‘separate electorates’, limited only to Muslims through the Indian Council Act in 1909. Later the Government of India Act 1919 expanded the involvement of the population through wider electorates and directed that Muslims and Hindus could continue to vote in separate electorates as long as the demand remained.

Critical of the representative character of the electoral system as developed by the British so far, Ambedkar had also started to advocate for political representation of the Depressed Classes and presented his views before the Southborough Committee in 1919. It was for the first time that Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Expressing himself before the committee, Ambedkar pointed out that politics in India cannot be understood without taking into consideration its social divisions; they do matter in politics. However, the committee did not accept this demand and instead added a provision in the Government of India Act 1919 for the nomination of members from the Depressed Classes in each Provincial Legislature. Ambedkar believed in pressing for equal rights and social and economic empowerment of the Depressed Classes and therefore, he soon started a full scale socio-political movement against the caste-based social hierarchy and for the empowerment of the Depressed Classes.

Subsequently, the Simon Commission in 1927 relooked into some of these demands and it was here that they finally accepted Ambedkar’s demand and granted separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. However, this was not accepted by Gandhi and other caste Hindu leaders. They wanted to keep the Untouchables within the Hindu fold and Gandhi launched his fast unto death in Pune in 1932. Under tremendous pressure to save the life of Gandhi, Ambedkar finally agreed to give up his demand of separate electorates for the Untouchables. An agreement, famously known as the Poona Pact, was reached between the representatives of the Hindus and the Depressed Classes, which altered the provisions of Communal Award by replacing the separate electorate by seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of the general electorate seats in the Provincial and Central Legislatures (for more on this read the unit on Representation). Provisions of the Poona Pact were later incorporated in the Government of India Act 1935.

This method has been followed in every election since 1935. The constituencies for these elections in the legislative bodies were either one-member, two-member or in some cases, even three-member constituencies. The electoral college of voters, however, comprised fewer numbers since there was no universal adult suffrage before 1950. After India’s independence, the Constitution of India dispensed with the two-stage election for Scheduled



Caste candidates. However, the provision of double-member constituencies was retained until its abolition and replacement by single-member constituencies in 1961. The new procedure was implemented in the 1962 general elections to Parliament and the same system is in practice even now. But the issue raised by Ambedkar that the Scheduled Caste members elected to the legislative bodies under the present electoral method (ever since 1937 elections) were not true representatives of the Scheduled Caste communities still remains unanswered.

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## 5.5 PARTY SYSTEM

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Ambedkar understood that political parties were essential in a democratic system. The secret of freedom in a democracy, he felt, was courage. And a political party – a combination of individuals - was the expression of this courage. A party, therefore, was necessary to run a government. He agreed that a political party was an essential adjunct to popular government, but he was critical of the rule of any single party and termed it as being in negation of a popular government. Taking cue from western democracies, such as Germany and Italy, he pointed out how one-party rule in those countries had led to the rise of totalitarian states. He, therefore, warned the country for hailing a one-party system in the name of national solidarity. He believed that any such move would lead democracy towards the possibilities of tyranny, as well as the possibilities of misdirection of public affairs, which were inherent in a one-party government. Single-party rule in a democracy limited it to become a mere form. Even subjecting it to elections was no guarantee against despotism. The real guarantee against despotism was to confront it with the possibility of its dethronement, of its being laid low, of its being superseded by a rival party.

A party is necessary to run a government. But two parties are necessary to keep a government from becoming despotic. A democratic government can remain democratic only if it is worked by two parties — a party in power and a party in opposition. Democracy is not possible without a strong opposition. Ambedkar was also very critical of introducing the British model of party system in India. The British system of government, he explained, rests on the premise of a party winning the majority, which would be a political majority. In India, however, no matter what the social and political programme of a party be, the majority will always be a communal majority. Thus, copying the British system in India would be permanently vesting executive power with the communal majority. In addition to that, the British system also imposes no obligation upon the majority party to include representatives of the minority party into the government. If applied to India, it would make the majority community a governing class and the minority community a subject race. It would mean that a communal majority would be free to run the administration according to its own ideas of what is good for the minorities. Such a state of affairs, Ambedkar clearly stated, can never be called a democracy.

The clashes between castes and creeds in the existing system of “graded inequality” in India, Ambedkar felt, would lead to an inevitable rise of a plethora of parties and groups in the legislature in India. If this happens, then under the model of British parliamentary system in which the executive is bound to resign upon an adverse vote in the legislature, India will suffer from instability of the executive. For, it is the easiest thing for groups to align and realign themselves at frequent intervals, even for petty purposes and bring about the downfall of the government. He therefore favoured the American model of executive over the British with some improvement in it.

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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Looking closely at the ideas of Ambedkar on elections and the party system, we understand his ideas on democracy. We have learnt how Ambedkar believed political democracy without social and economic democracy was a sham. We have also learnt that he was very critical of the parliamentary form of democracy. He pointed out that parliamentary democracy never took notice of economic inequalities. He explained how parliamentary democracy was not mindful of the fact that freedom of contract gave the strong the opportunity to defraud the weak. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs unto the poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class.

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## 5.7 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) What are the fundamental concerns of Ambedkar's ideas of democracy?
- 2) Why was Ambedkar critical of the West's understanding of democracy?
- 3) What does Ambedkar mean by social democracy in the Indian context?
- 4) Discuss Ambedkar's views on electoral democracy.
- 5) What was Ambedkar's understanding of the party system in India?

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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Rodrigues, Valerian. 2002. *B. R. Ambedkar: Essential Writings*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Thorat, Sukhadeo. 2008. *B. R. Ambedkar: Perspectives on Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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## UNIT 6 PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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### Structure

- 6.1 Objectives
  - 6.2 Introduction
  - 6.3 Meaning of Parliamentary Democracy
  - 6.4 Ambedkar's View on Parliamentary Democracy
  - 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
  - 6.6 Questions to Check Your Progress
- Suggested Readings

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### 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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This unit would enable you to understand:

- the meaning of parliamentary democracy;
- the contribution of B. R. Ambedkar to parliamentary democracy;
- the challenges and prospects of parliamentary democracy; and
- the contribution of parliament to democracy.

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### 6.2 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we will discuss the meaning of parliamentary democracy and Ambedkar's contribution of parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy is a democratic form of government in which the party (or a coalition of parties) with the greatest representation in parliament (legislature) forms the government, its leader becoming prime minister. Executive functions are exercised by members of parliament appointed by the prime minister to the cabinet. The parties in the minority serve as opposition to the majority and have the duty to challenge it regularly. The prime minister may be removed from power whenever he or she loses the confidence of a majority of the ruling party or of parliament. Parliamentary democracy originated in Britain and was adopted in several of its former colonies.<sup>1</sup>

Broadly, parliamentary democracy functions are according to certain postulates, the most important being responsibility of the executive to the legislature; and through the legislature ultimately to the electorate and the country. Another postulate is a peaceful transfer of governmental authority from one party to another either as the result of an adverse vote in parliament or after a general election. It presupposes a party government founded on collective responsibility. This is how the British Parliament has evolved. Parliamentary institutions elsewhere have copied this pattern with modifications and deviations; and India is no exception. Parliamentary democracy here bears about it the marks of its parentage.<sup>2</sup>

In a parliamentary democracy, the government must maintain the confidence of parliament at all times. Therefore, government formation and legislative decision making are necessarily intertwined, and a bargaining perspective is a natural approach to coalition formation and

policy choice. Moreover, as both government formation and legislations depend on representation in parliament, voters, to the extent that they respond to incentives related to policy outcomes, must base their voting decision on expected coalition formation outcomes. This is true especially in proportional representation systems, the modal electoral institution in parliamentary democracies. The incentives present in a parliamentary system also affect the continuity of governments and policy. In equilibrium, governments generally do not persist from one inter-election period to the next and neither do their policies. Government transition and policy change thus should be expected in parliamentary systems, independently of whether there are shocks to the system.<sup>3</sup>

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### 6.3 MEANING OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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India is the largest democracy in the world. Scholars have defined democracy in different ways. Dicey defines democracy as “that form of government in which the governing body is a comparatively large fraction of the entire nation. Bryce accepts the definition of Herodotus and says that democracy denotes that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is largely vested in the members of the community as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Bryce adds “This means in communities which act by voting, that rule belongs to the majority, as no other method has been found for determining peacefully and legally what is to be declared the will of the community which is not unanimous.”<sup>5</sup> Bagehot defines democracy as “government by discussion,” Lincoln as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people.”<sup>6</sup> But Ambedkar was not satisfied with the definitions of democracy given by Walter, Bagehot or Abraham Lincoln.

He viewed Grothe’s notions about freedom, self-government and democracy as fallacious and misleading. Ambedkar writes:

For, words such as society, nation and country are just amorphous if not ambiguous terms. There is no gain saying that ‘nation’ through one word means many classes. Philosophically, it may be possible to consider a nation as a unit but sociologically, it cannot but be regarded as consisting of many classes and the freedom of the nation, if it is to be reality, must vouchsafe the freedom of the different classes comprised in it, particularly of those who are treated as the servile classes.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ambedkar, democracy means, “a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed. If democracy can enable those who are running it to bring about fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the people accept those changes without resorting to bloodshed, then, I say, that there is democracy. That is the real test. It is perhaps the severest test.”<sup>8</sup>

He desired to remove the contradiction created by economic and social inequalities. He wanted to establish the principle of one man, one vote and one value not only in political life of India but also in social and economic life; in other words, he wanted political democracy to be accompanied by social democracy. He was conscious of the social and economic inequalities which corrode the national consciousness of the Indian people. He said, “we must make our political democracy a social democracy as well, political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy.”<sup>9</sup>

Democracy means that political power is ultimately in the hands of the whole adult population and that no smaller group has the right to rule. “Democracy only takes on a

more useful meaning when qualified by one or the other word with which it is associated, for example, liberal democracy, representative democracy, participatory democracy or direct democracy.”<sup>10</sup> Although all free societies are democratic, democracies can fail to protect individual freedom. Countries are considered democratic to the extent that they have fair and frequent elections in which nearly all adults have the right to vote, citizens have the right to form and join organizations and to express themselves. Democracy must ascertain the constitutional structure that best suits the needs of a particular country. Alternative forms of constitutional democracy include parliamentary versus presidential forms of government, plurality versus proportional representation system and federal versus unitary systems.

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## 6.4 AMBEDKAR’S VIEW ON PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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According to Ambedkar, “Parliamentary democracy is unknown to us at present. But India, at one time had parliamentary institutions. India was far more advanced in ancient times. If you go throughout the *Suktas* of *Mahaprinibbana*, you will find ample evidence in support of my point. In these *Suktas* it is stated that while Bhagwan Buddha was dying at Kusinara (Kusinagara) a message to the effect was sent to the Mallas who were sitting in session at that time. They decided that they should not close the session but would carry on with their work and would go to Kusinara after finishing of the business of Parliament.”<sup>11</sup>

Ambedkar was a fervent believer in democracy. He took a rationalistic and comprehensive view of democracy. He was, by philosophical persuasion, a liberal democrat. While pursuing the cause of justice for the Untouchables, he was in fact enunciating the democratic principle as the bedrock of justice.

His vision of a democratic society was one in which there will be neither an oppressor class nor a suppressed class; equality before law and in administration and functioning of moral order in society. He wrote elsewhere that a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity should be the only alternative to a caste society. It should be full of channels for conveying a change, taking place in one part to other parts. It should be mobile. There must be ‘social endosmosis’. This is fraternity which is only another name for democracy. He writes:

Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.<sup>12</sup>

He was aware of the fact that equality is a fiction and is “glaringly fallacious, “but believed that we cannot escape it. We can get the most out of people by “making them (everyone) equal as far as possible at the very start of the race.”<sup>13</sup> It is quite clear from this that he was taking a purely ‘secular’ approach to the problem of democracy, and he believed in democracy that was complete and real. He firmly believed that political democracy could not succeed without social and economic democracy. According to him, social and economic democracy is the tissue and the fibre of political democracy. He did not make a secret of his utter dissatisfaction and dismay at the inadequacy of the democratic edifice created in the Constitution of India, of which he himself was the chief architect.<sup>14</sup> In his address to the Constituent Assembly, he said:

On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of ‘one man one vote, and one vote one value’. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.<sup>15</sup>

So, he attached high importance to establishing the principle of ‘one man one value’ along with the principle of ‘one man one vote and, one vote one value’, that alone can make democracy complete and real. This is the soul of democracy. In other words, political power, economic strength and social position should be shared equally by all sections of society in a democracy. He pleaded for a share for the Dalits in the political power of the country so that they could influence decision making and participate in the policy-making process in their favour. “His idea of democracy is thus, tinged with social realism, human experience and reason, pragmatic and humanistic outlook on life.”<sup>16</sup> He accepted the theory of state socialism instead of communism or capitalism for achieving economic equality and prosperity.

To Ambedkar, three main things were inherent in parliamentary system of government. These were<sup>17</sup>:

- 1) Parliamentary government means negation of hereditary rule. No person can claim to be a hereditary ruler. Whoever wants to rule must be elected by the people from time to time. He must obtain the approval of the people. Hereditary rule has no sanction in Parliamentary System of Government.
- 2) Any law, any measure, applicable to the public life of the people must be based on the advice of the people chosen by the people. No single individual can presume the authority that he knows everything, that he can make the laws and carry the Government. The laws are to be made by the representatives of the people in Parliament. They are the people who can advise the men in whose name the law is proclaimed. That is the difference between the monarchical system of government and the democratic system of government. In monarchy the affairs of the people are carried on in the name of the monarch and under the authority of a monarch. In democracy the affairs of the public are carried on in the name of the head of the state, but the laws and the executive measures are the authority on which the government is carried on. The head of the state is the titular head; he is merely a symbol. He is a concentrated ‘Murti’. He can be worshipped but he is not allowed to carry out the government of the country. The government of the country is carried out, though in his name, by the elected representatives of the people.
- 3) Parliamentary system of the government means that at a stated period those who want to advise the head of the state must have the confidence of the people in themselves renewed.

According to him, “this is also not enough. Parliamentary system of government is much more than government by discussion. There are two pillars on which the parliamentary

system of government rests. These are the fulcrums on which the mechanism works. Those two pillars are (1) an opposition, and (2) free and fair elections.”<sup>18</sup>

About his preference of parliamentary system of government, Ambedkar wrote:

During the discussion in the Constituent Assembly, there was a variety of opinion as regards the nature of the Constitution that we should have. Some preferred British system; some the American system, there were others who did not want either of these two types of government. But after a long discussion a large majority of members came to a conclusion that the system of the parliamentary government as it is in Britain is best suited to our country. There are some sections of people who do not like the parliamentary government. Communists want the Russian type of government. The socialists are also against the present Constitution of India, they are agitating against it, they have declared that if they come to power they will modify it. Personally speaking, I am very attached to the parliamentary system of government.<sup>19</sup>

According to Ambedkar, there are some limitations leading to failure of parliamentary democracy in a country.

In a parliamentary democracy, the Executive may be held up by the Legislature which may refuse to pass the laws which the Executive wants and if it is not held up by the Legislature it may be held by the judiciary which may declare the laws as illegal. Parliamentary democracy gives no free hand to dictatorship and that is why it became a discredited institution in countries like Italy, Spain and Germany which readily welcomed dictatorships.<sup>20</sup>

Ambedkar analysed the reasons for the failure of some parliamentary democracies. He noted that even in countries pledged to democracy there may be a great deal of discontent and dissatisfaction against parliamentary democracy. “The discontent against parliamentary democracy is due to the realization that it has failed to assure to the masses the right to liberty, property or the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>21</sup>

The cause of this failure, he said, may be found in either wrong ideology or wrong organisation or both.

One such erroneous ideology is the idea of freedom of contract and its ignorance of the economic inequalities of the parties in the contract. Another wrong ideology that has vitiated the institution of parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize and feel that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy.

About bad organisation, he says the following:

All political societies get divided into two classes, the Rulers and the Ruled. This is an evil. If the evil stopped here it would not matter much. But the unfortunate part of it is that the division becomes so stereotyped and stratified that Rulers are always drawn from the ruling class and the class that is ruled never becomes the ruling class. This happens because generally people do not care to see that they govern themselves, they are content to establish a government and leave it to govern them.<sup>22</sup>

Ambedkar warned the harbingers of democracy that if parliamentarian democracy fails in this land, the result will be rebellion, anarchy and communism. He says:

I want you to take note of these eventful certainties and if you wish that parliamentary democracy prevails in this country, if you are satisfied that we will be assured of our liberty of thought, speech and action, if we should preserve our independence, if we cherish the inherent right of individual liberty, then it is your duty as student, as intelligent community of our country, to strive your utmost to cherish this parliamentary system of government in its true spirit and to work for it.<sup>23</sup>

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## 6.5 LET US SUM UP

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In context of the preceding discussion it is now possible to set out the key characteristics of a parliamentary democracy. Parliaments differ from one another in terms of social and economic context. There are federal and unitary states. There are presidential and parliamentary systems. There are single and dual-chamber parliaments. Above all there are enormous differences between countries, not only in their size, but also in their levels of economic development, and in the resources that are consequently available to parliaments for carrying out their work. Ambedkar firmly believed that without social and economic democracy political democracy could not succeed. According to him, social and economic democracy is the tissue and the fibre of political democracy.

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## 6.6 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) If parliaments are to survive as an effective instrument of mankind, they must adapt themselves to the great social and political forces and problems of our time. Critically discuss giving suitable examples.
- 2) Discuss the challenges and prospects of parliamentary democracy.
- 3) Discuss in detail giving suitable examples of parliamentary contribution to democracy.
- 4) Analyse the political philosophy of Bhim Rao Ambedkar in context of parliamentary democracy.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>16</sup> Rajasekhariah, A. M., and Hemalata Jayaraj. 1991. pp. 357-375.
- <sup>17</sup> Bharathi, K. S. (1998). *The Political Thought of Ambedkar* (Encyclopaedia of Eminent Thinkers). Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi 110059, pp 78-79
- <sup>18</sup> Bhagwan Das. 1963. pp. 52-53.
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- <sup>20</sup> K. S. Bharathi. *Foundation of Ambedkar Thought*. Nagpur: Dattasons Publishers. 1990. pp. 140-141.
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## UNIT 7 SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

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### Structure

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Ambedkar's Conception of Social Democracy
- 7.4 Equality as a Prime Value of Democracy
- 7.5 Safeguarding Fundamental Rights
- 7.6 State Socialism as a Feature of Welfare State
- 7.7 Struggle for Democratic Society
- 7.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.9 Questions to Check Your Progress

Suggested Readings

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### 7.1 OBJECTIVES

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This unit would enable you to understand:

- Ambedkar's understanding of democracy in general and his conception of social democracy in particular;
- Basic features of Ambedkar's conception of social democracy in terms of equality, rights, freedom and justice;
- Just and righteous social order as the key to the success of democracy against caste system and Hindu social order; and
- Ambedkar's state socialism as an alternative to capitalism and socialism.

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### 7.2 INTRODUCTION

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Social democracy has emerged as a significant concept in the twentieth century. Conceived as an alternative to both liberalism and Marxism, it came into existence with the recognition of the limits of both capitalism and socialism. It is associated with the welfare state, and the values of equality and solidarity. It builds upon commitment to shared values and social responsibilities. It emphasizes ethical living with a communitarian slant. Social democracy is primarily based on the idea that the state should ensure security and equality for all and must play a role in reordering society accordingly. Social democracy believes in gradual and incremental change. It considers that socialism may be established through lawful means rather than by force.

Social democracy as a practical concept offers an account of the complex interplay among ideas of legitimacy, efficiency and stability. It aims to enhance the functionality and stability of democratic states. It seeks to explain the functional deficiencies of libertarian democracy. It allows active participation of people in institutions of democracy. It makes

institutions accountable to people. It attempts to actualize rights. Social democracy insists that democracy and associated rights must be extended to social and economic spheres as well. Social security, justice and participation play important roles in improving the quality of democracy in a given society.

Social democracy is about practically realizing the value of democracy at societal level. This belief became prominent in the west with the failure of liberalism and socialism in realizing their ideals in society. The idea of democracy gained ascendancy in the aftermath of the Second World War and took various forms, such as political democracy, economic democracy and social democracy.

Social democracy co-exists with values like equality, community living and justice. The contours of social democracy vary on the basis of how one conceives and relates these values and ideals. In India, Ambedkar came with ideas aimed to abolish the highly discriminatory and inhuman caste system. One can decipher some variant of social democracy as an ideal from his writings and practice. The key values of his variant of social democracy are equality, society as an ethically constituted community and state socialism.

Ambedkar, as an important political philosopher, has creatively enriched the tradition of social democracy. Against the liberal versions of democracy, he provides a new meaning to democracy in general and social democracy in particular. He adopts social democracy as a principle in building the Indian nation state. He understood that political equality is not sufficient for the working of democracy. Social and economic equality are essential conditions for effective functioning of political democracy. Social freedom plays a vital role in expanding the horizons of social equality and democracy. Universal human rights and fundamental rights can be realized in the true sense only by ensuring a righteous social life. He finds the source of these rights in normative social life rather than in legal imposition. However, he recognizes the importance of legal provisions in safeguarding weak and vulnerable social minorities from the wrath of the powerful. He upholds the role of the state as interventionist, in minimizing the existing inequalities and ensuring the freedom of its citizens. State has to be egalitarian and aim at promoting the welfare of the people. In this direction Ambedkar deviates from the typical discourse and argues for state socialism as a political framework and social justice as a principle of social democracy rather than being carried away with either liberalism or socialism.

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### **7.3 AMBEDKAR'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

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Ambedkar not only conceptualized democracy suited to Indian conditions but also fought for realization of the ideals of democracy. He addressed the question of social dynamics arising out of the functioning of a democratic government in an undemocratic society. He articulated the concerns of people who were deprived of basic civil rights.

To understand his conception of democracy, we have to look into his writings, speeches, struggles and his involvement in nation-building (through his participation at various levels in the British Indian government and Independent India). In his efforts, we may find his quest for real democracy.

Social equality, freedom, associated living, just social order and moral governance are recurring themes in his writings and his struggles for liberation of the oppressed.

Ambedkar defines democracy distinctly, addressing historical, political and social specificities of India and puts it in a philosophical way. He views democracy as a desired moral principle of governance and suggests mechanisms to enrich it for the common good. In other words, Ambedkar aspires to nurture the culture of democracy in all spheres of life. For him it is not just an ideal but also a social necessity to build a good society.

Democracy is based on the doctrine of one man one value. The fundamental principle of modern democratic states is the recognition of the value of the individual. It is based on the belief that each individual has but one life, and full opportunity should be accorded to each to attain his maximum development in that life. Neither of these propositions can be said to be part of the accepted philosophy of aristocracy of India.<sup>1</sup>

According to Ambedkar, a democracy is quite different from a republic as well as from a parliamentary government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of government, parliament or otherwise. Before adopting parliamentary democracy in India, Ambedkar had critically evaluated the functioning of parliamentary democracy in the West. He identified that wrong ideologies and wrong organisations were responsible for the failure of democracy in the western countries that had adopted democracy as a form of government. The rulers were always drawn from the ruling class and the class that was ruled never becomes the ruling class. So democracy did not fulfill the hopes it held out to the common man of ensuring to him liberty, property and pursuit of happiness.

Socialism is an alternative to parliamentary democracy and many countries had adopted this form of government. However, Ambedkar was critical of this form of government and identified it with dictatorship. Ambedkar upholds parliamentary democracy over socialism by giving a new meaning to democracy. He extended the spirit of democracy from political to include both social and economic domains. His conception of state socialism internalized the principle of socialism and carried it through the democratic form of government. He favoured state socialism without dictatorship and with parliamentary democracy. He prescribes state socialism through the law of constitution. His vision of democracy is to strike a balance between equality and liberty so that associated living in a pluralistic society is ensured.

Ambedkar explains that parliamentary democracy rests on four premises:

- a) The individual is an end in himself.
- b) The individual has certain inalienable rights, which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution.
- c) The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of privilege.
- d) The state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.<sup>2</sup>

Ambedkar's notion of parliamentary democracy is not confined to political domain only but deals with social and economic issues too. He laid down the following preconditions for the successful working of modern democracy:

- 1) There must be no glaring inequalities in the society. There must not be an oppressed and suppressed class. There must not be a class which gets all privileges and a class which gets all the burdens to carry.

- 2) The opposition must be strong and effective.
- 3) Law and administration must be equal for all.
- 4) Constitutional morality must be observed.<sup>3</sup>

For Ambedkar, 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 social relationships, in terms of associated life between the people who form a society.<sup>4</sup> He has this to say about society:

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. The existence of the caste system is standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The caste system depicts the evils which cut at the very roots of democracy.

According to him,

Democracy is that form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of people are brought about without bloodshed.<sup>6</sup>

He criticizes the dominant tendency that views politics and ethics as two different and unrelated realms. He suggests that politics cannot be conceived separately from ethics. He emphasizes democracy as a moral social order rather than mere political governance. His view of democracy connects both social and political aspects as a part of common moral sphere. Ambedkar argues that democracy requires a moral order in society. In this direction, he further enriched his earlier definition. According to him,

Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards our fellow men.<sup>7</sup>

Democracy is spoken of as free government. Free government means that in vast aspects of social life people are left free to carry on their life without interference of law, or if law has to be made, then the law-maker expects that society be founded on morality to make the law a success. Ambedkar observed that only Laski categorically proposes moral order as the basis of democracy.<sup>8</sup> Ambedkar further adds that democracy requires 'public conscience'. Public conscience means conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer, and it means that everybody, whether he suffers that particular wrong or not, is prepared to join him in order to get him relieved.<sup>9</sup>

For Ambedkar, democracy is not merely a form of government. It is essentially a form of society. A democratic form of government pre-supposes a democratic form of society. The formal framework of democracy is of no value and would indeed be a misfit if there were no social democracy.<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar believed that political and economic revolutions have no meaning unless a social revolution takes place. He cites examples from history that show that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. In other words, he argued for ethically constituted society for effective functioning of democracy. In the Indian context, he argued for the abolition of the caste system and viewed it as anti-social in spirit for its divisive, discriminatory, hierarchical and exploitative character. He further identified that these features of the caste system are regulated by the Hindu social order. To realize social democracy, one requires an attitude

of respect and equality towards one's fellow human beings. The social organisation must be free from rigid social barriers. Democracy is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness.<sup>11</sup>

Ambedkar observed that in Hindu society, there are privileges for few and disabilities for the vast majority. Hindu society offers no rights which the moral sense of man could recognize. Ambedkar upheld social democracy as viewed by M.G. Ranade. Ambedkar believed that Ranade struggled to craft rights and aimed to create a social democracy, without which there could be no sure and stable politics. He further endorses Ranade's position that you cannot be liberal by halves. You cannot be both liberal in politics and conservative in religion. The heart and head must go together.<sup>12</sup>

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## 7.4 EQUALITY AS A PRIME VALUE OF DEMOCRACY

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Ambedkar's conception of social democracy is based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. The idea of equality is a fundamental value of democratic life. In Ambedkar's view liberty and fraternity are derived from equality. He holds that where equality is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied. In other words, equality pre-supposes democracy. According to Ambedkar:

Democracy is another name of equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and farce.<sup>13</sup>

Ambedkar accenuates the necessary connection between equality, liberty and fraternity as a key principle of democracy and mandates a balance between them for the success of democracy.

Political thinkers recognized that formal equality of citizenship is not enough for a meaningful life. Democracy requires an equality of democratic agency. Democracy is ideal for human beings because it is the only form of society which at once depends upon and provides for the organisation of free communication. It demands equality, because it is only as equals that men can communicate. Equality as a moral ideal is necessary for realization of democracy in any sphere of life especially in a society where inequalities are internalized.

In political theory, the idea of equality is addressed in a limited sense, being mostly confined to political equality and silent about economic equality. Ambedkar extends the idea of equality to social and economic realms. He argues for equality in a caste-ridden society based on graded inequality. He calls for equality of untouchable communities in terms of dignity and self-respect. His notions of the individual, the community and the religion are strikingly different from those of others, in that he imbues them with reason, justice and ultimately morality.

Ambedkar observed that to realize democracy as an ideal, Indian society has to overcome its social order which is built on the principle of inequality. He pointed out that the Hindu social order is reared on the following three principles:

- Graded inequality.

- Fixation of occupations of each class and its continuance by heredity.
- Fixation of people within their respective classes.

This scheme of graded inequality is designed and preserved to maintain social inequality. The Hindu social order leaves no choice to the individual. It fixes his *occupation*. It fixes his *status*. All that remains for the individual to do is to *conform* himself to these regulations. Ambedkar observed that the principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field.

*'From each according to his ability; to each according to his need' is not the principle of Hindu social order. The principle of the Hindu social order is: From each according to his need. To each according to his nobility. Every side of social life is protected against the danger of equality.*<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar viewed Hindu social order as based primarily on class or varna and not on individual worth; there is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. He further holds the position that inequality is the official doctrine of Brahmanism and lower classes have been suppressed remorselessly by Brahmins. Ambedkar says: *Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity.*<sup>15</sup> In the words of Ambedkar,

*Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion of compensation. Equity signifies equality. Rules and regulations, right and righteousness are concerned with equality in value. If all men are equal, then all men are of the same essence, and the common essence entitles them of the same fundamental rights and equal liberty... in short justice is another name of liberty, equality and fraternity.*<sup>16</sup>

Ambedkar maintains that society has to discover aptitudes and capacities of individuals and train them progressively for social use. He emphasizes that there are indefinite pluralities of capacities in an individual which may characterize his persona. A society to be democratic should pave the way to use all these capacities of the individual. Social conditions necessary for flourishing of democracy are :

- Social equality,
- Economic security and
- Access to knowledge.

Ambedkar believes that the more equal the social rights of citizens are, the more able they are in utilizing their freedom.

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## 7.5 SAFEGUARDING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

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Ambedkar's conception of rights is rooted in the idea of equality that goes against an unjust social order and oppression ascribed in the name of religion. He foresees the connection between rights, social order and economic structure. He believes that the rights promised must be accessible to all citizens in everyday life. He envisages fundamental rights for all the citizens in a liberal democratic framework. At the same time, he emphasizes safeguarding the rights of the weak and the vulnerable against the majoritarian and dominant social groups. On the one hand he upholds the rights of the citizens in

relation to state, on the other he upholds moral conscience against law. He mediates between the rights of the individual and those of the groups, the state and the society, in egalitarian and ethical terms.

The object of enacting fundamental rights is to protect the liberty of the individual from invasion by other individuals. The connection between individual liberty and the shape and form of the economic structure of society may not be apparent to everyone. Ambedkar considers that the untouchable cannot be economically independent so long as he lives in a ghetto as a dependent part of the Hindu village. He further points out that the majoritarian *Hindu religion as a code of life gives Hindus many privileges and heaps upon the untouchable many indignities which are incompatible with the dignity and sanctity of human life.*<sup>17</sup>

In the Hindu social order, dalits are often discriminated against in everyday life, both in private and public. Ambedkar argues that discrimination is a menace that must be guarded against if the fundamental rights are to be real rights. In a country like India where it is possible for discrimination to be practiced on a vast scale and in a relentless manner, fundamental rights can have no meaning.<sup>18</sup>

Unequal treatment has been the inescapable fate of the untouchables in India. In this backdrop, Ambedkar puts emphasis on recognition of differences. His argument for special provisions for dalits in legislature, education and opportunities is very much in the spirit of liberalism but adapted to the specific context of the Indian nation. He articulated dalit rights in the name of rights for untouchables, depressed classes, scheduled castes and tribes in a given historical context. Along with fundamental rights applicable to all citizens, he proposed benefit of various provisions for the protection of minorities and in addition special safeguards for scheduled castes (dalits).

Ambedkar considers dalit rights as minority rights against the majoritarian Hindu society. He differentiates between social and religious minorities. Dalits are viewed as social minority and Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others are viewed as religious minorities. He pleaded for special provisions and protection of religious minorities because of the economic and educational backwardness of these communities rather than on the grounds of religion. He viewed dalit rights as group-specific rights for dignity, self-respect and development in all fields of life, for realization of a fuller human being.

He further maintains that state, instead of being neutral, has to play an interventionist role to protect the rights of dalits. *The depressed classes must be made free citizens entitled to all the rights of citizenship in common with other citizens of the state.* He also felt the need to extend the rights to many other minority communities that are suffering from similar treatment at the hands of the majority community. It is therefore necessary to have such a provision to ensure that all citizens shall have equal benefit of laws, rules and regulations.<sup>19</sup>

Ambedkar believed that,

*rights are real if they are accompanied by remedies. It is no use giving rights if the aggrieved person has no legal remedy to which he can resort when his rights are invaded. Consequently when the constitution guarantees rights it also becomes necessary to make provision to prevent the legislature and the executive from overriding them.*<sup>20</sup>



Ambedkar was of the opinion that fundamental rights have no meaning unless until state protects the weak and the marginalized.

However, Ambedkar found the source of rights in the moral conscience of society rather than in law. He maintains:

*As experience proves, rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society. If social conscience is such that it is prepared to recognize the rights which law chooses to enact, rights will be safe and secure. But if the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, no law, no parliament, no judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the word.<sup>21</sup>*

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## 7.6 STATE SOCIALISM AS A FEATURE OF WELFARE STATE

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Unfortunately, democracy could give effect only to the doctrine of one man, one value so far as the political structure is concerned. It has left the economic structure intact and allowed market forces to mould it. It was equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society, if democracy was to live up to its principle of one man, one value. Ambedkar made an attempt to define by the law or constitutional framework both the economic structure as well as the political structure of society. Ambedkar pointed out that in the West, parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and didn't care to examine the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract, in spite of the fact that they were unequal in their bargaining power.

Ambedkar considered state socialism, which treats everybody equally, ensures fundamental rights and safeguards the weak and vulnerable groups, as another important dimension of social democracy. State socialism is a regulative principle of the nation's economy. The state has to plan the economic life of people on lines that would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise, and also provide for equitable distribution of wealth. The plan proposes state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation and a modified form of socialism in the field of industry; it places squarely on the shoulders of the state, the obligation to supply the capital necessary for agriculture as well as for industry.

Ambedkar considers state socialism essential for economy and for India's rapid industrialization. Private enterprise cannot do it, and if it did it would produce those inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe and which should be a warning to Indians.<sup>22</sup> Ambedkar maintains that state socialism has to be established by the law of the constitution and thus makes it unalterable by any act of legislature or executive. Ambedkar attempts to establish state socialism without abrogating parliamentary democracy and without leaving its establishment to the will of a parliamentary democracy.

According to the classical liberal position, liberty remains where the state refrains from intervention. Ambedkar differs with this and poses a question that, to whom and for whom is this liberty? Obviously this liberty is the liberty of landlords to increase rents, of capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rates of wages. In other words, what is called liberty from the control of the state is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer.

Economic dependence has other consequences also besides the condition of poverty and degradation which proceeds from it. The Hindu has a code of life, which is part of his religion. The code of life gives him many privileges and heaps upon the untouchable many indignities that are incompatible with dignity and sanctity of human life. For the development of an individual, economic opportunities have to be provided and the state has to play a role in this regard.

Ambedkar's state socialism is a way out of capitalism and Brahmanism. He firmly believed that freedom of the individual is possible only under parliamentary democracy and not under dictatorship of any kind.

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## 7.7 STRUGGLES FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

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For Ambedkar, society means associated living. Associated living is another name for democracy. It means showing respect and concern for fellow beings. Society should nurture the feeling of belongingness by exhibiting solidarity. Society means communication among individuals and groups of people rather than living in isolation. He looks for society as a community that is based on strong foundations of morality. Ambedkar saw Hindu society as being antithetical to these ideals. Ambedkar believed that the Hindu social ideal as prescribed by Hindu religion has acted as a most demoralizing and degrading influence on Hindu society.

*It consists 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. The existence of the caste system is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.<sup>23</sup>*

Ambedkar further argued for the prosperity of the full capacity of an individual.

*There is in a man an indefinite pluralities of capacities and activities which may characterize 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.<sup>24</sup>*

Ambedkar reiterates his vision of social democracy through his writings and struggles. The election manifesto of the Schedule Castes Federation illustrates his position on social democracy:

The party will treat all Indians not only as being equal before the law but being entitled to equality and will accordingly foster equality where it does not exist and uphold where it is denied.

It will regard every Indian as an end in himself with a right to his own development in his own way and the State as only a means to that end.

It will uphold the right of every Indian to equality of opportunity subject to the provision that those who have had none in the past shall have priority over those who had.

It will keep the State ever aware of its obligation to make every Indian free from want and free from fear.

It will insist on the maintenance of liberty, equality and fraternity and will strive for redemption from oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class and of nation by nation.

It will stand for parliamentary system of government as being the best form of government both in the interest of public and the interest of the individual.<sup>25</sup>

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## 7.8 LET US SUM UP

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Ambedkar is an important political philosopher, who contributed to the tradition of social democracy. In principle, he argued for one man, one value and equality before law in a hierarchical society. Ambedkar's conception of democracy represents a liberalism of a different kind, encompassing elements of socialism. Equality, in both theory and practice is an essential component of his conception of democracy. He wanted to broaden the scope of equality from political domain to include social and economic domains as well. His conception of democracy has both instrumental and intrinsic values. He moves beyond liberalism by arguing that the essence of democracy lies in associative, communicative and righteous social life. He brings in a communitarian view of democracy that is based on strong foundations of morality.

Ambedkar is critical about Hindu community, which does not recognize the individual worth and capabilities. He attacks Hinduism for its non-recognition of human personality and its deliberate debasement. He observed that the philosophy of Hinduism from the viewpoint of justice reveals that it is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity. He proposes a moral community based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. He believes that individuals make sense of their identity in a moral community and proposes reflexive individualism.

Ambedkar argues that social and economic democracies are the tissues and fiber of a political democracy. He maintains that the tougher the tissue and fiber, the greater the strength of the body. Moreover, the strength of Ambedkar's vision of social democracy lies in balancing equality, liberty and fraternity in both idealistic and realistic terms.

For Ambedkar, the roots of democracy lie not in the form of government but in social relations. He maintains that the preconditions for the success of democracy are that there must not be glaring inequalities in society and there must be statutory provisions to mitigate the sufferings and safeguard the interests of the oppressed. Ambedkar considers the disadvantaged should be the constitutive basis of the state. He demands special considerations for certain groups based on disadvantage, disability, subordination, oppression and injustice.

He developed a complex set of criteria to determine the state of disadvantage and attempted to specify its various gradations. He argues for a need for a system of safeguards for the disadvantaged in general and untouchables in particular. Ambedkar observed that the rights guaranteed by the state are not enough to protect the rights of Dalits; social and moral conscience to protect laws are also required. He puts more emphasis on the moral society and its customs than on the written legal law in governing people. He considers that social morality is required for effective functioning of a democratic form of government.

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## 7.9 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) What are the basic features of Ambedkar's social democracy?
- 2) How do you see the principle of equality being central to the flourishing of democracy?
- 3) Discuss Ambedkar's critique of the Hindu social order and in what way is it an impediment to democracy?
- 4) What is the role of the state in bringing about economic equality and protecting the rights of its citizens?
- 5) Write a short note on Ambedkar's conception of state socialism.
- 6) What do you understand about Ambedkar's emphasis on moral conscience over written legal law in governing the people?

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## UNIT 8 FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

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### Structure

- 8.1 Objectives
  - 8.2 Introduction
  - 8.3 Vision of Democracy
  - 8.4 Challenges to Democracy
  - 8.5 Future of Democracy
  - 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
  - 8.7 Questions to Check Your Progress
- Suggested Readings

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### 8.1 OBJECTIVES

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This unit would enable you to understand:

- the basic meaning and vision of democracy;
- Ambedkar's views on democracy; and
- the future of democracy.

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### 8.2 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we will emphasize the meaning and vision of democracy and also reflect Ambedkar's views on democracy and the future of democracy. Ambedkar did not see democracy as a mere mechanical tool for forming an elected government through political competition of self-interested individuals aspiring for political office. For him it was an expression of fraternity in which representative and represented are bound by love, affection, empathy and share equal dignity. Democracy is both an end and a means in a sense that it is a vision of good society based on ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity and above all dignity; it is also an institutional arrangement to achieve those ideals.

Ambedkar upheld the fundamental western idea of democracy i.e. government of the people, by the people and for the people, but gave it a more substantive meaning. He believed that democracy was a way of life. He said, "democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen."

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### 8.3 VISION OF DEMOCRACY

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Democracy as a form of government or as a mode of associated living does not bear the same meaning across time and space. The ancient Greeks had Athenian democracy. The Athenian democracy was different from our modern democracy in a sense that it allowed over fifty percent of its population to be slaves, who had no place in the government at all. The rest of the people who were free in Athens enjoyed all civil and political rights.

Secondly, democracy even in the same country has not always been the same. Democracy in England before and after the revolution of 1688 was different; democracy in France after the French revolution of 1789 did not remain the same. Similarly democracy in India

before 1947 was not the same as we have it today. Democracy not only undergoes changes in form, it also undergoes change in purpose. The purpose of modern democracy is not so much to put a curb on an autocratic king but to bring about the welfare of the people.

Although democracy has changed a lot, at its core lies a government by discussion. Drawing inspiration from Buddhism, Ambedkar argues that the tradition of governing people by discussion is not new to India. Although it is unknown to us at present, India was far more advanced in ancient times. He cites example of the *Suktas* of *Mahaparinirbhana* in which it is stated that while Buddha was dying in Kushinara (Kushinagar), a message was sent to the Mallas who were sitting in session that time and discussing important affairs of governance. When they received the message about Buddha, they decided that they would not close the session, but carry on with their work and will go to Kushinara after finishing of the business of parliament. They were devoted to parliamentary institutions.

The Buddhist Sanghas also had a rule about parliamentary procedure, i.e. no discussion without motion. They also followed the system of secret ballot, so much in vogue now. Buddhist Sanghas had ballot papers, which they called *Salapatraka Grahakas*. Unfortunately all this past heritage that was good has been lost.

This ancient Buddhist understanding of democracy also gets its reflection in the modern parliamentary governments. In *The English Constitution* (1867), the British essayist Walter Bagehot sums up the essence of parliamentary government in one sentence. He says parliamentary government means government by discussion, not by fisticuffs. Ambedkar's vision of democracy also draws inspiration from Abraham Lincoln, who in his famous Gettysburg speech, defined democracy as "a government of the people, by the people and for the people." This definition of Lincoln assumes the underlined unity and fraternity of the people and any division of the people on the basis of hierarchy or mutual repulsion will ruin democracy.

If democracy is to succeed in India, it needs to redefine itself in terms of its purposes. Ambedkar defined democracy "as a form and method of government whereby revolutionary change in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed." If democracy can enable those who are running it to bring about fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the people accept those changes without resorting to bloodshed then it can be said that there is democracy in India.

What are the conditions which must exist in order that the democratic form of government may continue to work without any kind of hindrance? Ambedkar enumerates seven conditions for the successful working of democracy in India.

- 1) No glaring inequality in the society. Neither should there be an oppressed class that carries all the burden nor an oppressive class that has all the privileges. A glaringly unequal and oppressive society has within itself the germ of bloody revolution and perhaps it would be impossible for democracy to cure it.
- 2) An effective opposition. Democracy means that at some stage somewhere there must be a veto on authority. The government should be subject to veto at the hands of the people every five years and there must be people in parliament to challenge the government immediately in the house itself.

- 3) Equality in law and administration. The administration must be discrimination-free and must treat everyone equally. The government must not interfere in administration as its task is to formulate policy.
- 4) Constitutional morality must be observed. The Constitution is a mere skeleton of the polity whereas constitutional morality is the flesh and blood of polity. The Constitution is a set of rules of the game; people must be ready to obey it.
- 5) The moral order of the society must be functioning. The moral order of the society is often taken as granted in a democracy. If there is no moral order, democracy will go to pieces.
- 6) In the name of democracy, there must be no tyranny of majority over minority.
- 7) Public conscience must exist. Public conscience means the conscience that becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer and it means that everybody, whether he or she suffers that particular wrong or not, is prepared to join in to set right, a wrong.

Along with aforesaid seven conditions precedent for the successful working of democracy in India, Ambedkar talks about two pillars on which parliamentary democracy rests; these are the fulcrum on which the mechanism works. These are:

- an opposition
- free and fair elections.

There are always two sides to a question of polity; it is necessary that the people should know both the sides. If one side is represented by the government then the other is raised by the opposition, hence a functional opposition is required in a successful parliamentary democracy. An effective opposition is the key to a free political life of a democracy.

Free and fair elections are necessary for the transfer of power from one section of community to the other in a peaceful manner and without bloodshed. Ambedkar warns us not to lose sight of the fact that big businesses, corporate houses and black money are playing a big role in the political life of this country. If moneyed people try to influence the election by contributing to the election funds of any political party, they will naturally try to extract concession for themselves either by modifying present legislation or by influencing the party in power to legislate in such a manner as would be beneficial to their interests.

In *Mahabharatha*, when somebody asked Bhishma as to why he was supporting the *Kauravs* if he found the *Pandavas* to be in the right, Bhishma replied, "I must be loyal to the salt: if I eat the food of *Kauravas*, I must take their side even if they might be in the wrong." Thus ensuring free and fair elections and keeping use of money power out of electioneering is the biggest challenge for a successful future of Indian democracy.

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## 8.4 CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

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B R Ambedkar in his famous parting speech to the constituent assembly said:

On the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality... How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long



shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril.

Economic equality is imperative for the success of the western model of parliamentary democracy. Political scientists such as Alexis de Tocqueville argue that democracy in America (the US) and Europe is a success because the majority of the population in these countries is middle class. India adopted the model of western democracy even though its middle class was virtually absent and a considerable part of its population consisted of poor, illiterate and starving people. The stark economic inequality bears the seed of revolution in its womb, if not rectified, sooner than later, it shall blow up the institution of democracy in India.

Democratic politics demands a democratic society at its base, the undemocratic social structure based on hierarchy and mutual hatred is a danger to the successful working of democracy in India. In India, society does not recognize individuals, as is the case of modern liberal democracies; rather it recognizes innumerable castes that are exclusive to each other, have no common experience to share and have no bonds of sympathy.

Caste is a system of graded inequality. This means castes are not equal in their status; they stand one above another. This system breeds jealousy and destroys willing and helpful co-operation. It is an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. Castes are bound to occupations thus, stunting the growth of individuals. The existence of caste system is a standing denial of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy. Then the question is how to put an end to the caste system? Ambedkar suggests the following for the destruction of the caste system:

- education for the lower castes
- inter-dinning
- inter-caste marriage
- sharing of political power.

The birth of egalitarian social order is a pre-condition to a substantive democratic politics.

The gains of democratic politics are often of no use in highly religious and superstitious societies. For Ambedkar, primacy of religion over politics posed a great challenge to democracy in India. Taking a case of Roman society, Ambedkar illustrates that the power of religion over man often make him blind to his material needs and political power.

In Roman society there were two classes of citizens, patricians (upper class) and plebians (lower class). Plebians fought hard to obtain a share in political power, and had secured the appointment of a plebian consul elected by a separate electorate constituted by an assembly of plebians in the supreme executive under the Roman Republic. In the ordinary course of things the plebians should have got a strong plebian consul in view of the fact that his election was to be by a separate electorate of plebians but this did not happen. The reason for this was the domination of religion over the minds of the Roman people. It was an accepted creed of the Roman people that no official could enter upon the duties of his office unless the Oracle of Delphi declared that he was acceptable to the Goddess. The priests who were in charge of the temple of the goddess of Delphi were all patricians. Whenever therefore the plebians elected a consul who was known to be a strong party man opposed to the patricians, the oracle invariably declared that he was not acceptable to the Goddess.

What is worthy of note is that the plebians permitted themselves to be thus cheated because they too, like the patricians, held firmly the belief that the approval of the Goddess was a condition precedent to an official taking charge of his duties, and that election by the people was not enough. If the plebians had contended that election was enough and that the approval by the Goddess was not necessary, they would have derived the full benefit from the political right which they had obtained.

If parliamentary democracy fails in our country for the reasons mentioned by Ambedkar, if the people in power do not realize that the masses will not tolerate unbearable social inequality, economic inequality and hereditary political authority, the only result will be rebellion, anarchy and communism.

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## 8.5 FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

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The future of democracy in India depends a great deal on:

- reconciling ethnic pluralism with elaborate institutional arrangement of minority rights
- ensuring that people on social and economic margins, find representation at every level in institutions and processes of democratic politics.

It is an imperative for Indian polity to put an end to segregation and injustice. “I, me, myself and my India is the only world within which I am bound.” If people start to think like this, the minority which is suffering from injustice gets no help from others for the purpose of getting rid of injustice. This can develop a revolutionary mentality which puts democracy in danger.

However, there are also counter-trends, in the form of growth of democratic space and democratic spirit. There has been a rise in various kinds of social movements which have expanded individual rights and community rights. The quality of Indian democracy has also improved. There is now a better representation of women in politics especially at grassroot level. The most powerful and promising trend is the growing participation of the underprivileged, especially Dalits and Backward Classes. They have understood the meaning of political power as a master key which opens the gate to all opportunities. Therefore, they are participating in large numbers, not only as mute participants by way of voting, but with the spirit and enthusiasm to change the democratic landscape of the country. This new trend in Dalit Bahujan politics has been termed as the “Second Democratic Upsurge” by political scientists. It seems that the future of Indian democracy is in their able and safe hands unless economic democracy fails them miserably.

In its most general sense, Ambedkar pinned his hope for economic democracy mainly on state action:

- central planning
- collectivization of agriculture
- state ownership of key industries, public health and education.

The study of the changing nature of the Indian state suggests that after a brief euphoria of socialism and withdrawal of state during LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization), the Indian state is reinventing itself and having greater clarity about the scope of expanding economic democracy through means other than state socialism, such

as the following:

- worker management
- producer co-operatives
- non-profit organisation
- participatory planning
- community control over environmental resources
- a renewed focus on providing universal basic services like primary education and health care.

Indian democracy is still relatively young – seven decades are not a long time to make the transition from a society around the privileges of a small minority to one governed “by the people for the people”. To meet the demand of social transformation by state action, the state in India has made several protective legislations for various marginalized groups i.e. Dalits, tribals, women and minorities. Although effective implementation of laws is a challenge before the Indian democracy, it has definitely started an unfinished journey on the invaluable advice of B. R. Ambedkar that,

Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity which are not to be treated as separate items in trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity.

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## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

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In short, Ambedkar’s conception of democracy is that of a revolutionary democracy which aims at bringing social transformation and human progress. It dispels conservative elements, superstition and hierarchy in society, and attempts to establish an egalitarian social order, so that every citizen of this country gets an environment in which fullest development of his personality becomes a reality.

The aim of democracy is to end gender inequality, caste discrimination, safeguard minority rights, safeguard tribal rights and minimize the inequality of income, status and opportunity, and to uphold the principle of one person one value and one vote. It is a form of government working on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity, which is capable of bringing revolutionary change in the economic and social life of people without bloodshed.

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## 8.7 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) According to B. R. Ambedkar, what are the necessary conditions for a successful democracy in India?
- 2) Examine B R Ambedkar’s definition of democracy. How does it differ from a dogmatic definition of democracy?
- 3) Discuss the role of opposition in the successful working of democracy in India.

- 4) What is the future of Indian democracy considering the challenges it is facing today.
- 5) What do you understand by social democracy? Is parliamentary democracy in India a social democracy?

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