
UNIT 3 IDEAL SOCIETY

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Concept of Society and Ambedkar's View
 - 3.3 Ambedkar's Notion of Ideal Society
 - 3.4 Essential Principles of Ideal Society
 - 3.5 Recognising Means to Realise an Ideal Society
 - 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
 - 3.7 Questions to Check Your Progress
- Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand:

- the concept of society as envisioned by Ambedkar;
- Ambedkar's notion of ideal society interwoven with his notion of justice;
- the differences between the Hindu social order and the ideal society propounded by Ambedkar; and
- Ambedkar's notion of equality, liberty and fraternity as key principles of an ideal society.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss Ambedkar's notion of ideal society, the differences between the Hindu social order and ideal society. The life of Bhimrao Ambedkar unfolds a saga of creativity, newness and philosophical arguments. His socio-economic and political ideas make him significant and relevant in different periods of history. His idea of an ideal society reveals his serious and civilized sensibility, deep thinking and wide-ranging vision. He was, above all, a passionate rationalist and radical humanist. His ideal society provided dignity, equality and harmonious life for citizens. Ambedkar's social philosophy of life is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. However, he did not derive this philosophy from the French Revolution, but as he himself claims from the teachings of the Lord Buddha. He writes:

My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.¹

With this philosophy he sought to establish a new egalitarian social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity, values that are reflected in our Constitution, which seeks to secure justice: social, economic and political. Ambedkar, with his multi-dimensional and versatile personality, a great spirit of sacrifice and a scientific outlook, led and continues to lead movements of self respect throughout

India. In 1936 he declared that the model of his ideal society must be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He equated fraternity with democracy and spelt out the nature of an ideal society. Ambedkar observed:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. 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.²

With its meaning, fraternity assures the dignity of an individual and the unity and integrity of a nation. Such fraternal relationship is the need of the day not only in India but the world over especially when tensions and chaos prevail in the life of human beings everywhere.

3.2 CONCEPT OF SOCIETY AND AMBEDKAR'S VIEW

Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties. We call this ever- changing, complex system society. It is a web of social relationships. And is always changing.³ Society has been defined as a relatively self-sufficient, usually large group of people who maintain direct or indirect contact with each other through a culture.⁴

In other words society is not something tangible. . It does not denote a concrete reality, but refers to social relationships, which become institutionalised, when people relate to each other in well-established and familiar ways.⁵ Let us discuss Ambedkar's views on society.

Ambedkar's Views on Society

Ambedkar's views of society are different from those of others. For example, according to Aristotle, "man is by nature and necessity a social animal. Hence he lives in society. Thus society is quite natural, essential, eternal and universal. It is instrumental in evolving such an atmosphere which would be conducive not only for the satisfaction of his primary wants, but for the development of his personality."⁶ To Ambedkar, society was not an organism as some people hold; it was based mainly on human attitudes. The organisation has certain essentials, which go to make up a real view of society.

He cited examples of Hindu festivals. Different castes observe similar festivals, yet these parallel performances of similar festivals among different castes and groups have not been able to bind them into one integral whole.

For constituting society, what is necessary for a man is to share and participate in a common activity so that the same emotions are aroused in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure, is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them.⁷ Thus society is another name for more

or less cordial inter-relationship between human beings living in a geographical area.

Ambedkar, as a humanist, did not believe in the superiority of either the social order or the individual. Society exists in the individual and the individual cannot live without society. He believed in an integrated view of man and society. Man apart from man is impossible. In other words, the individual is not superior to society as capitalism holds; nor society is superior to the individual, as communism believes, but society and the individual, to Ambedkar, are inter-dependent.

Hindu Social Order

Ambedkar's vision exposed the unjust and exploitative character of the Hindu religion and social order. He viewed untouchability as an institution of socio-religious oppression, for denial of human rights by the dominant elements. He found the roots of the problem in the structure of the Hindu society which is a by-product of the Hindu four varna system. He believed that the untouchable is a by-product of both the varna and the caste system, hence there will be untouchables as long as the caste structure exists. Towards the end of his life, Ambedkar had come to believe that nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the system. For many years, he tried to improve the lots of the untouchables through struggles. He argued that "the salvation of the depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel in that he must alter his ways." Further he stated that "I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus."⁸ He listed the following three basic principles on which the existing social order stands:

- The principle of graded inequality, which is a fundamental principle of this order, which divides the society not only horizontally into thousands of castes or sub-castes or communities but also vertically, which is worse.⁹
- Fixity of occupations.¹⁰
- The fixity of people within their respective classes. This means that every person's caste status or class status is decided by birth – not by his or her ability.

In the latter part of his life, Ambedkar studied Buddhism and concluded that the basic character of a religion should be humanism. Essentially, his concept of humanism was about a social order of justice. Justice gives a comprehensive framework to modern society.

3.3 AMBEDKAR'S NOTION OF IDEAL SOCIETY

Most of the writings of Ambedkar were to establish an "ideal society"¹¹ or a "caste less society"¹² or a society grounded on the "principles of justice." The connotation of all these three types of society is almost same: The society must be based on the three principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Further, to understand Ambedkar's vision of a just society it is pertinent to understand the meaning of these three principles. However, let us understand the context in which a need for a just society or ideal society arose in Ambedkar's mind.

Acknowledging the fact that "nowhere is human society one single whole. It is always plural,"¹³ he observed the following about an ideal society:

The questions to be asked in determining what an ideal society are: How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared by the groups? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of associations? Are the forces that separate groups and classes more numerous than the forces that unite? What social significance is attached to this group life?¹⁴

Thus, he contemplates a society which is plural in character, but not static, rigid, traditional and orthodox in behaviour. It would give fair and equal chance to each and everybody for their progress and bind all the people into one common cultural bond. “Ethically” he stated, “all people are heterogeneous. It is the unity of culture that is the basis of homogeneity.”¹⁵ The unity of culture obviously could be developed only when the society is based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

3.4 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF AN IDEAL SOCIETY

Ambedkar in his work “Annihilation of Caste,” describes his ideal society. He shows how very relevant are in the context of the Indian society which is divided into castes and religious communities. Each caste group tends to create its own distinctive type of like-mindedness, which depends upon the extent of communication and participation. In Ambedkar’s words:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts (means communication or what is happening at one part and it should be convey to another part). In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis.¹⁶

Ambedkar, not only suggested the total annihilation of caste or caste-based society, but his starting point was an offering of a model of an ideal society or what he called a ‘just society’. For his ideal society, he recognised the following principles:

First, he emphasised “that the individual is an end to himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and the development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary.”¹⁷

“The second principle is that the terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity.”¹⁸

The third cardinal principle of an ideal society is to have a society based on democratic principles and providing - political, economic and social justice by constitutional measures and by breaking the monopoly of upper strata on political power. In this context on 25th November 1949, Ambedkar said:

(T)here can be no gain saying that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few and the many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey. This monopoly has not merely deprived them of their

chance of betterment; it has shaped them of what may be called the significance of the life. These down-trodden people are tired of being governed. They aspire to govern themselves. The urge for self-realization in the down-trodden classes must not be allowed to develop into a class struggle or class war. This can only be done by the establishment of equality and fraternity in all walks of life.¹⁹

One of the key themes of the writings of B.R. Ambedkar was the attainment of social justice and establishment of a just society,²⁰ which, for him, was essentially a casteless society. He not only provided a ruthless criticism of the existing social order but also came up with an alternative vision and alternative model of social order based on justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and annihilation of caste.²¹ Further, to describe the ideal society Ambedkar discusses the meaning of liberty, equality and fraternity in a number of works.

Liberty: According to Ambedkar, liberty includes civil liberty and political liberty. Civil liberty refers to liberty of movement, liberty of speech (which includes liberty of thought, liberty of reading, writing and discussion) and liberty of action. Political liberty consists in the right of the individual to share in the framing of laws and in the making and unmaking of governments.²²

Equality: The nature and manifestation of fundamental characteristics, which appear in all human beings, are summed up in the phrase, 'moral equality'. Therefore, in essence, the phrase 'moral equality' asserts in ethical value, a belief to be sustained and recognition of rights to be respected, because a "society without any response for human personalities is a band of robbers."²³

Fraternity: "Fraternity is another name for fellow feeling. It consists in a sentiment which leads an individual to identify himself with the good of others whereby 'the good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to like any of the physical conditions of our existence.'"²⁴ Fraternity, according to him, is "essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen."²⁵

To achieve equality and justice, he made frantic efforts to get socio-economic safeguards to the down-trodden people and submitted a memorandum to the First Round Table Conference (1930) held in London. The memorandum included several justified and valid points to build a modern and just society. However, he was doubtful about the just society and convinced that mere political equality will not be enough for the welfare of Shudras and the marginalised. In fact socio-economic equality was needed for them. Therefore, while participating in the Constituent Assembly debates, he observed:

On 26th 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 principles of one-man one-vote, and one-vote one-value. In our social and economic life, we shall, be reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principles 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 democracy which this Constituent Assembly has so laboriously built up".

Ambedkar, therefore, to ensure social justice persuaded the Constituent Assembly to incorporate provisions in the Constitution itself. Accordingly, under Articles 14-18, the right to equality, untouchability were been declared an 'offence'.

As a result of his relentless fight for social justice for the down-trodden people, several provisions for protection of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, and minorities were incorporated in the Constitution.

3.5 RECOGNISING MEANS TO REALISE AN IDEAL SOCIETY

It is, however, not impossible to bring into reality the ideal society depicted by Ambedkar. This could be recognised by the following ways.

First, it is necessary to do away with the caste-ridden social order. Ambedkar says that "reason and morality are the two most powerful weapons in armoury of a reformer."²⁶ They should be put to use. It is necessary "to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras, and to make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras."²⁷ Then they would be willingly ready to inter-dine and inter-marry.

Second, Ambedkar suggested accepting the scheme of state-socialism, in which agricultural land and key industries would be nationalised. Neither there would be forced labour nor dependency. State socialism ensures one-man, one-value; as such every individual would lead his life with dignity.

Third, he advocated that the political structure should be such that everyone would be able to get an equal share in power. All the people would enjoy their fundamental rights and fulfill their obligations. Untouchability would be abolished and its practice would be an offence punishable by law.

Fourth, restructuring of the society, socially, economically and politically could be done not by bloody revolution but by constitutional means. He contemplated solving all the problems within in the framework of the Constitution.

In totality, Ambedkar visualised an integrated society in which there is love for all and malice towards none. He prefers Buddhism as an example of ideal society which constitutes the required principles for man to live a good and happy life.

Buddhism: An Example of Ideal Society

Ambedkar thought that Buddhism met the criterion of a religion which has a social vision, scientific outlook, provided solutions to the problems of the deprived millions, upheld equality and individual freedom and emphasised love and compassion. He was interested not only in a casteless religion but in an ideal, scientific religion and society. He found it in Buddhism. In his article "Buddha and the future of his religion" he conceives of religion as a force which governs society through morality. There he states three requirements which a religion should fulfill:

- It must be in accord with science,
- It must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity, and
- It must not sanctify and ennoble poverty.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The preceding discussion has explained Ambedkar's notion of justice, just society and ideal society which is based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. It was suggested that Ambedkar's notion of ideal society was embedded in Buddhism. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that Ambedkar thought Buddhism to be perfectly consistent with modern liberal democratic philosophy. According to Ambedkar:

...democracy was not a form of government: it was essentially a form of society. It may not be necessary for a democratic society to be marked by unity, by community of purpose, by loyalty to public ends and by mutuality of sympathy. But it does unmistakably involve two things. The first is an attitude of mind, an attitude of respect and equality towards their fellows. The second is a social organisation free from rigid social barriers.²⁸

3.7 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) What is ideal society according to Ambedkar?
- 2) Discuss the characteristics of equality, liberty and fraternity?
- 3) Differentiate between Hindu social order and ideal society as propounded by Ambedkar?
- 4) Define the Buddhism as an example of ideal society?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Ambedkar, B.R. "Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi." Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989.

Ambedkar, B.R. "Philosophy of Hinduism," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987.

Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987.

REFERENCES

(Endnotes)

¹ Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Quotations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, <http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb/quotations.htm>

² Ambedkar, B.R. "Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi." Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches. Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. p.57.

³ R.M. Maciver and Charles H. Page. Society: An Introductory Analysis (New Delhi, Macmillan India Limited, 1987 Reprinted), p. 5.

⁴ Op. cit. The Study of Society, ESO-11 (New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2009), p. 10.

⁵ Ibid. 20.

⁶ Op. cit. Kanta Kataria: Relevance of Ambedkar's Ideology (Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2015), p. 145

⁸ Keer, Dhananjay. Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission. New Delhi. 1984, p. 221.

⁹ Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon, Bombay, 1987. p.107.

¹⁰ Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.11.

¹¹ Ambedkar, B.R. "Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. p.57.

¹² Ibid, p.80. Ibid, p.80

¹³ Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1. (Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), p.64.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 64.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁶ Ambedkar, B.R. "Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. p.57.

¹⁷ Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches. Vol.3 compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.95

¹⁸ Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.11.

¹⁹ Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Constituent Assembly speech on Friday, 25th November 1949, available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol11p11.htm>).

²⁰ See for details, James Massey. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: A Study in Just Society. New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 2003 and Rathnam P.V. Socio-Political Philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Hyderabad, Ambedkar-Lohia Socialist Centre, 2003.

²² Ambedkar, B.R. "Philosophy of Hinduism," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.38-39.

²³ Ambedkar, B.R. "The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles," in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.96-97.

²⁴ Ambedkar, B.R. “Philosophy of Hinduism,” in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.3. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1987. p.44.

²⁵ Ambedkar, B.R. “Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi,” in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. p.57.

²⁶ Ambedkar, B.R. “Annihilation of Caste with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi,” in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. p. 106.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 100.

²⁸ Ambedkar, B.R. “Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah,” in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol.1. Compiled by Vasant Moon. Bombay, 1989. P. 222.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY