



Dr. Ambedkar's as a writer and Thinker: His Vision and patriotism

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Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Dr. Ambedkar are the names which belong to different times as well as the different parts of the world. But they have one thing in common, i.e. they all delivered powerful and epoch making speeches which shaped the history of races and nations. Ambedkar's final speech in Constituent Assembly which was delivered on November 25, 1949 can easily be termed as one of the greatest speeches ever delivered not only in India but also in the known history of entire mankind.

Dr. Ambedkar, who is viewed as a national hero today and whom any political party can ignore only at its own peril, faced much social and political hostility during his life time. He did not allow the discrimination and insult he had to deal with during his formative years to fill him with bitterness and negativity. On the other hand, he made full use of the opportunities that came his way in a positive and constructive manner and rose to great heights as a scholar. So much so that out of the 389 members of Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar was the person who was considered to be scholarly and equipped enough to be the Chairman of the Draft Committee. On November 25, 1949, Ambedkar delivered the speech which revealed to the posterities the thinker, philosopher, visionary, reformer, rationalist, logician, humanist and nationalist that he was.

The speech makes an interesting study in the sense that it marks the difference between Dr. Ambedkar and the most of the present parliamentarians in their approach towards the concepts of public money and time. As the chairperson of the Drafting Committee, Dr. Ambedkar took special care that the public money is put to good and effective use and that the committee makes the maximum use of the time available. The Drafting Committee had taken 141 days during which it was engaged in the preparation of the Draft Constitution but looking at the stupendous job which the committee had at its hands to do, it was no mean achievement to complete the job in this time framework. Ambedkar says:

“I mention these facts because at one stage it was being said that the Assembly had taken too long a time to finish its work, that it was going on leisurely and wasting the public money. It was said to be a case of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. Is there any justification for this complaint? Let us note the time the consumed by Constituent Assemblies in other countries appointed for framing their Constitutions. To take a few illustrations, the American Convention met on May 25th 1787 and completed its work on September 17, 1787 i.e., within four months. The Constitutional Convention of Canada met on the 10th October 1864 and the Constitution was passed into law in March 1867 involving a period of two years and five months. The Australian Constitutional Convention assembled in March 1891 and the



Constitution became law on the 9th July 1900, consuming a period of nine years. The South African Convention met in October, 1908 and the Constitution became law on the 20th September 1909 involving one year's labour. It is true that we have taken more time than what the American or South African Conventions did. But we have not taken more time than the Canadian Convention and much less than the Australian Convention. In making comparisons on the basis of time consumed, two things must be remembered. One is that the Constitutions of America, Canada, South Africa and Australia are much smaller than ours. Our Constitution as I said contains 395 articles while the American has just seven articles, the first four of which are divided into sections which total up to 21, the Canadian has 147, Australian 128 and South African 153 sections. The second thing to be remembered is that the makers of the Constitutions of America, Canada, Australia and South Africa did not have to face the problem of amendments. They were passed as moved. On the other hand, this Constituent Assembly had to deal with as many as 2473 amendments. Having regard to these facts the charge of dilatoriness seems to me quite unfounded and this Assembly may well congratulate itself for having accomplished so formidable a task in so short a time.”

Though the speech was delivered on a very solemn occasion, yet Dr. Ambedkar never fails to make a graceful and intelligent display of his fine sense of humour when he confronts the charges levelled against him in particular and the Drafting Committee in general. The most likeable point of Dr. Ambedkar's response is that his humour is without malice and bitterness though the charges are of personal and demeaning nature. The idea of grace was something to which he gave value and which he maintained making a use of his intelligence and wit. He says:

“Turning to the quality of the work done by the Drafting Committee, Mr. Naziruddin Ahmed felt it his duty to condemn it outright. In his opinion, the work done by the Drafting Committee is not only not worthy of commendation, but is positively below par. Everybody has a right to have his opinion about the work done by the Drafting Committee and Mr. Naziruddin is welcome to have his own. Mr. Naziruddin Ahmed thinks he is a man of greater talents than any member of the Drafting Committee. The drafting Committee does not wish to challenge his claim, on the other hand. The Drafting Committee would have welcomed him in their midst if the Assembly had thought him worthy of being appointed to it. If he had no place in the making of the Constitution it is certainly not the fault of the Drafting Committee.

Mr. Naziruddin Ahmed has coined a new name for the Drafting Committee evidently to show his contempt for it. He calls it a Drifting committee. Mr. Naziruddin must no doubt be pleased with his hit. But he evidently does not know that there is a difference between drift without mastery and drift with mastery. If the Drafting Committee was drifting, it was' never without mastery over the situation. It was not merely angling with the off chance of catching a fish. It was searching in known waters to find the fish it was after. To be in search of something better is not the same as drifting. Although Mr. Naziruddin Ahmed did not mean it as a compliment to the Drafting committee, I take it as a compliment to the Drafting Committee. The Drafting Committee would have been guilty of gross dereliction of duty and of a false sense of dignity if it had not shown the honesty and the courage to withdraw the amendments



which it thought faulty and substitute what it thought was better. If it is a mistake, I am glad that the Drafting Committee did not fight shy of admitting such mistakes and coming forward to correct them.”

This response shows that Dr. Ambedkar was grace personified even in face of bitter and undeserved criticism. This part of the speech also shows his central place in the Constituent Assembly as well as Drafting Committee. It is also a proof that he was courageous enough to admit his mistakes and was always open to constructive criticism as well-intentioned rectifications. There were people and scholars in the Constituent Assembly as well as Drafting Committee who could boast of an intellectual tradition of five thousand years in their genes, yet there was this man (whose ancestors had been bearing the burden of excruciating and dehumanizing tradition of untouchability for centuries) who happened to get some real education and proved that there was no other person in whole India who was better qualified and equipped to be the head of the Drafting Committee. It was because of this reason that the Constituent assembly put the heavy burden of drafting the constitution of such a big and diverse country on Dr. Ambedkar’s able shoulders.

Despite having such important position in such an important task and all his education and scholarship, Dr. Ambedkar’s words and responses were marked by a great degree of humility. He is profuse in his thanks towards the various members of the assembly as well as the Drafting Committee. Besides that, he was a brave politician and statesmen. He uses most graceful expressions to praise his political opponents whenever he thinks that they really deserve his appreciation.

The speech also makes an abundant display of his political acumen when he makes a comparative study of different political ideologies. He intelligently and methodically points out the gaps in Marxist and socialist theories. He says:

“The condemnation of the Constitution largely comes from two quarters, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Why do they condemn the Constitution? Is it because it is really a bad Constitution? I venture to say no'. The Communist Party want a Constitution based upon the principle of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They condemn the Constitution because it is based upon parliamentary democracy. The Socialists want two things. The first thing they want is that if they come in power, the Constitution must give them the freedom to nationalize or socialize all private property without payment of compensation. The second thing that the Socialists want is that the Fundamental Rights mentioned in the Constitution must be absolute and without any limitations so that if their Party fails to come into power, they would have the unfettered freedom not merely to criticize, but also to overthrow the State.

These are the main grounds on which the Constitution is being condemned. I do not say that the principle of parliamentary democracy is the only ideal form of political democracy. I do not say that the principle of no acquisition of private property without' compensation is so sacrosanct that there can be no departure from it. I do not say that Fundamental Rights can never be absolute and the limitations set upon them can never be lifted. What I do say is that the principles embodied in the Constitution are the views of the present generation or if you



think this to be an overstatement, I say they are the views of the members of the Constituent Assembly.”

The speech also shows the practical wisdom which Ambedkar possessed in abundance and which he used to sail through the difficult situations. Having put his best efforts in the making of the constitution, he explains it clearly to the assembly that a constitution is as good or bad as are the people who put it into practice. He remarks:

“...I shall not therefore enter into the merits of the Constitution. Because I feel, however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. The working of a Constitution does not depend wholly upon the nature of the Constitution. The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depends are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics. Who can say how the people of India and their purposes or will they prefer revolutionary methods of achieving them? If they adopt the revolutionary methods, however good the Constitution may be, it requires no prophet to say that it will fail. It is, therefore, futile to pass any judgement upon the Constitution without reference to the part which the people and their parties are likely to play.”

Dr. Ambedkar was not merely a sane voice for parliamentary democracy but he also did not fail to see the evils which it would counter in the future times. It was because of this reason that he makes a case against political slavery and exploitation in the name of party discipline. He praises the Congress party for its support during the whole process but he does not forget to name and praise some congressmen who were no less than rebels as they rose against their own party line whenever it was required. Dr Ambedkar calls them rebels with a cause.

In this speech, we also get a fair idea of Dr. Ambedkar’s idea of nationalism. To him, a nation cannot survive for long if it is divided into different caste and regional identities. He had always been of this view that political freedom did not mean much if the masses did not have social freedom. He also hints toward the dangers of dictatorship in his speech. He says that the history of the country gives him anxiety. Here people have been giving preference to their personal agendas over the nation and its people. He remarks:

“Will history repeat itself? It is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds .we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indian place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost for ever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood.”



To conclude, we may say that Dr. Ambedkar's this final speech in the Constituent Assembly proves beyond doubt that he was visionary who was much ahead of his times. He was a champion of the downtrodden and did much for their uplift and betterment. He was a nationalist who was not bound by narrow thinking and sectarianism. If we really want our future generations to be open-minded and progressive, there should be efforts to make it sure that every child has the opportunity to read this speech in true spirit. We all Indians can congratulate ourselves that we had among us a personality who has the mind and will power to liberate people from the bondages of slavery as well as narrow thinking.

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