



Liberty, Equality, & Fraternity: Three Jewels Of Ambedkar And Contemporary India

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Abstract: Liberty, equality, and fraternity are foundational principles for a democratic state. Together, these principles create an environment where democracy can thrive, ensuring that governance is by the people, for the people, and that every voice is valued. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emphasized the principles of “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” which he considered essential for a just society. He believed these values were crucial for uplifting marginalized communities and ensuring social justice and democratic governance in India. Liberty for Ambedkar was the freedom to express oneself and to live without oppression. He believed that true liberty entailed not just political freedom but also social and economic emancipation, enabling individuals to pursue their aspirations without fear of discrimination or deprivation. Equality was central to Ambedkar’s philosophy, advocating for the elimination of caste-based discrimination and socio-economic disparities. He argued for equal rights and opportunities for all, ensuring that every individual, regardless of caste, creed, or gender, could contribute to and benefit from the nation’s progress. Fraternity emphasized a sense of brotherhood and solidarity among citizens. Ambedkar believed that fostering a spirit of fraternity was crucial for maintaining national unity and integrity. It called for mutual respect and cooperation, transcending social and cultural barriers, to build a harmonious and inclusive society. His vision of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity remains a cornerstone for India’s ongoing struggle against social inequalities and for the realization of a truly democratic and egalitarian society.

Keywords: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Democracy, Buddhism

Introduction:

“ Equality will be no value without Fraternity or Liberty. It seems that the three can coexist only if one follows the way of the Budhha ”

:- Dr BR Ambedkar

Bharat Ratna Dr Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar, known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was born on April 14, 1889, in the British founded town and military cantonment of Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. Belonging into a Marathi lower caste family (treated as untouchables), he faced significant social discrimination. He was not allowed to sit inside the class when he needed to drink water, someone from a higher caste had to pour that water from a height as they were not allowed to touch either the water or the vessel that contained it. This task was usually performed by the school peon and if the person was not available then he had to go without water; Ambedkar described the situation later in his writing as “No peon, No water”. Despite these challenges, he excelled academically, earning degree from Bombay University, Columbia University and the London School of Economics.

Ambedkar was a jurist, economist and social reformer. He campaigned against caste discrimination and untouchability, advocating the rights of Dalits. He was politically active, founded the independent Labour Party and later the Schedule Caste Federation. As the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar played a crucial role in framing the Indian Constitution, ensuring provisions for social justice and fundamental rights. Ambedkar argued that political freedom alone is meaningless without social and economic freedom. For Ambedkar liberty was intertwined with the removal of social barriers, especially caste discrimination. He worked tirelessly to secure constitutional guarantees for equal treatment and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of caste, creed or gender. The principle liberty, equality, and fraternity are universal and provide the foundation for a democratic and inclusive society that benefits everyone, not just the Dalit or marginalized communities. He believed that fraternity could combat all social isolation and foster a more cohesive and just society. On 14 October 1956, he converted to Buddhism, rejecting the caste system of Hinduism. He had neuropathic pain in his legs and diabetes, after two months of his conversion to Buddhism he died in his sleep on 6 December 1956 at his home Delhi.

Understanding Liberty, Equality & Fraternity :

The idea of liberty and equality has been a long-standing unresolved debate ranging from traditional to contemporary political philosophy. In modern times, the renaissance and enlightenment periods challenged classical monarchies and autocratic governments and revived the concept on a universal level. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: these words are regarded as the most famous slogan of the French Revolution, started in 1789 ended in 1799 which reflects fundamental values that underpin modern democratic societies. Simply, Men and women are born and remain free and equal in rights. These principles are interrelated and collectively aim to create a society where individuals can freely pursue their goals, enjoy equal rights, and support one another in a spirit of unity. Liberty may formally described as ‘absence of restraint’. It’s mean that in order to maintain liberty of the individual, the state should not impose any restraints on his activities in various sphere of life. Isaiah Berlin mentioned two types of liberty in his book, “*Two Concept of Liberty*” 1958, first one is Negative liberty, concerned with the inviolable area of non-interference and not with the condition in society i.e., absence of obstacles, barriers of constraints. Second one is Positive liberty, where one can be free only in society and not outside it. Therefore, it is the possibility of acting or the fact of acting in such a way as to take control of one’s life and realize ones fundamental purpose. B.R. Ambedkar was significantly influenced by the ideas of John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher and political economist. Mill’s liberal philosophy, especially his ideas on equality, social justice, defense of personal liberty and the need to protect individuals from societal and governmental oppression. This influence is evident in Ambedkar’s advocacy for the rights of the Dalits and other marginalized communities in India. Democracy is closely related to the idea of freedom; Every individual in the community must enjoy certain minimum rights for a free and civilized existence. In Indian Constitution,

these fundamental rights are described in the Preamble as freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. The Chapter of Fundamental Rights clearly guarantees this freedom subject to certain rules; After all, freedom must not be converted into license if democracy is to survive.

The concept of equality has evolved over centuries, shaped by philosophical discourses, political revolutions, and social movements. It emphasizes the idea that all individuals are inherently equal and deserve equal treatment and opportunities. Equality implies that all individuals have the same rights and opportunities. It encompasses various dimensions, including political, social, economic, and legal equality. Political equality ensures that every citizen has the right to participate in the democratic process. Social equality promotes the removal of discrimination based on caste, religion, gender, or ethnicity. Economic equality focuses on providing equal opportunities for all to achieve economic success. Legal equality ensures that everyone is subject to the same laws and has access to justice. It is a cornerstone of democratic societies, promoting social justice and harmony. Jean-Jacques Rousseau expanded on the concept of equality through his social contract theory. Rousseau argued that in a state of nature, individuals were free and equal. However, the establishment of property and social hierarchies led to inequality. To address this, Rousseau proposed a social contract where individuals collectively agree to form a government that protects the common good and ensures equality among citizens. The concept of equality is a multifaceted principle that encompasses political, legal, social, and economic dimensions. Ambedkar was acutely aware of the injustices prevalent in Indian society. His vision for a just and equal India significantly influenced the drafting of the Constitution. His relentless advocacy for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities is reflected in the constitutional provisions aimed at abolishing untouchability and promoting social justice. His efforts ensured that the practice of untouchability was declared illegal and punishable by law. The inclusion of reservation policies in the Constitution, providing Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other backward classes with reserved seats in educational institutions and public employment. These measures aimed to level the playing field and provide equal opportunities to those who had been historically oppressed. He believed in the need for land reforms, labor rights, and education to empower the underprivileged. The Indian Constitution contains several articles specifically aimed at ensuring equality i.e., Article 14; Equality Before the Law, Article 15; Prohibition of Discrimination, Article 16; Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment, Article 17; Abolition of Untouchability, Article 18; Abolition of Titles. These provisions are designed to protect individuals from discrimination and promote equal opportunities.

Fraternity refers to a sense of brotherhood and mutual respect among members of a community or nation. It involves fostering a sense of solidarity and common identity, transcending individual differences such as caste, religion, language, or region. Fraternity is crucial for maintaining social harmony and ensuring that the diverse elements of society work together towards common goals. It embodies the idea that despite individual and group differences, there is a shared sense of belonging and mutual support. The principle of common citizenship is directed towards strengthening this sense of 'unity and integrity' of the nation. DR. Ambedkar said, "Fraternity is the principle which gives unit and solidarity to social life". It is the feeling that will protect the unity of India against external attack or disintegration through internal unrest born of social, political and economic causes. The concept of fraternity is explicitly mentioned in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. The Preamble declares the resolve to secure for all its citizens "justice, liberty, equality, and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation." This articulation highlights the integral role of fraternity in achieving the broader goals of justice, liberty, And equality. It reflects the aspiration to create a cohesive society where individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds, live in harmony and contribute to the nation's progress. Article 51A of the Indian Constitution lists the Fundamental Duties of citizen is to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic, regional and sectional diversities. The dignity of individuals is ensured by Fundamental rights, DPSPs and Fundamental duties.

Buddhism and BR Ambedkar :

On 14th October 1956, BR Ambedkar converted to Buddhism with around 3,65,000 of his followers at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur. BR Ambedkar was deeply influenced by the teachings of Buddha and saw them as a source of inspiration for his own ideas on liberty, equality and fraternity. BR Ambedkar is considered as the father of Neo-Buddhism, a modern interpretation of Buddhism that emphasizes social and political action.

- I) **Historical background & Democratic practices :** The Shakyas dynasty, a significant part of the ancient Indian history. The most famous Shakyas was Siddhartha Gautama (Born around 563BC in Lumbini, Nepal) who renounced his royal life to seek enlightenment and later became known as the Buddha. His father, King Suddhodana, was a ruler of the Shakyas kingdom. Unlike many contemporary states that were monarchies, the Shakyas had a republic form of government. This system was characterized by an oligarchic democracy where power vested in a council rather than a single ruler. The central place for governance was the Santhagara, an assembly hall where the council met to discuss and decide on political, social and legal matters. Decisions in the Shakyas republic were made through discussion and consensus. This process allowed for a more democratic approach compared to the autocratic rule of monarchies. They had a structured legal system where disputes were resolved in the assembly.
- II) **Influence of Buddha :** BR Ambedkar was drawn to Buddhism's emphasis on reason, scientific inquiry and social equality. He believed that Buddhism should be a way for social and political change. Ambedkar saw Buddha's teachings as a call to individuals liberty free from the shackles of caste, creed and religious dogma. Buddha's prominence on personal responsibility and self-reliance was essential for individual liberty. Buddha was a powerful critique of social inequality and the equal potential for enlightenment of all beings was a call to social equality. He encouraged followers to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion towards all beings, promoting a sense of fraternity and solidarity.

Ambedkar's interpretation of the Three Jewels i.e., The Buddha (the teacher), The Dhamma (the teaching), and The Sangha (the community) was shaped by his own experiences of caste discrimination and social inequality. He saw Buddhism as a powerful tool for social transformation and a means to change the dominant social and political order. Through his work, Ambedkar sought to make Buddhism a force for social change and human rights in India.

Relevance of Ambedkar's principles in contemporary India:

Dr. BR Ambedkar's principles deeply embedded in the ideals of social justice, equality and democracy, continue to hold significant relevance in contemporary India. One of Ambedkar's fundamental concerns was the deep-rooted caste system, which he believed was the greatest obstacle to liberty and equality in India. Despite legal prohibitions and affirmative action policies, caste-based discrimination and social exclusion remain prevalent in contemporary India. Dalits and other marginalized communities still face significant barriers in access to education, employment, and social services. Furthermore, economic inequality in India has grown, with the wealth gap widening between the rich and the poor. Ambedkar's advocacy for economic justice is increasingly relevant as the country faces challenges related to poverty unemployment, and the informal labour sector.

In contemporary India, where there is often tension between traditional practices and constitutional mandates, Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality serves as a guiding principle. The concept of constitutional morality, which implies adherence to the values enshrined in the constitution – justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity- above all else. It encourages citizens and institutions to prioritize constitutional values over regressive social norms, ensuring that democracy is not merely a system of government but a way of life. The human community is rooted in shared values that bind individuals together, fostering a sense of belonging, cooperation, and mutual respect. These principles are essential for the development of any just and democratic society. In today's India, these principles are more than just ideals—they are essential tools for addressing the country's

most pressing issues. As India navigates the complexities of modernity, globalization, and rapid socio-economic changes, these values provide a moral and ethical compass. These principles are the bedrock upon which a fair, democratic, and harmonious society can be constructed, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of their background, can contribute to and benefit from the nation's progress. However, the application of these values requires constant vigilance. As India continues to evolve, so too must its commitment to these foundational principles, ensuring that they are not only preserved but also actively promoted in every aspect of national life.

Conclusion :

The concept of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, inspired by the Three Jewels of Budhha, were deeply ingrained in Dr BR Ambedkar's philosophy and social transform. He infused these ancient ideals with a modern, democratic, and humanistic spirit, making them relevant to the struggles of the marginalized and oppressed communities in India. Through his writing and speeches, and political activism, Ambedkar inspired a generation of Dalits, women, and other marginalized communities to fight for their rights and challenges the status quo. Ambedkar's work particularly in drafting the Indian Constitution, reflects his commitment to these principles. His legacy continues to inspire social and political movement in India and beyond, serving as a beacon of hope for a more just and equitable society. Ambedkar's work serves as a testament to the enduring power of ideas and the human spirit's capacity to challenge and transform oppressive systems. The Three Jewels of Budhha, through Ambedkar's lens, remain a powerful symbol of the struggle for human rights, social justice, and universal values. May his work and legacy continues to guide us towards a world where liberty, equality, and fraternity are not just ideals, but a reality for all.

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