
UNIT 3 PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND B. R. AMBEDKAR

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R.Ambedkar are two architects of Independent India. To Nehru was given the singular honour of raising the flag of independent India in New Delhi on 15 August 1947, when India gained Independence, while Ambedkar was entrusted with the task of framing the Constitution of the new Republic. In this Unit you are expected to understand:

- Nehru's appreciation of the virtues of parliamentary democracy, secularism and liberalism coupled with concerns for the poor and underprivileged that guided him in formulating policies which influence India to this day.
- Ambedkar's theory that there cannot be authentic political democracy without social democracy. Social reforms should precede political reforms. Mere democratic form of government is not the remedy for all social and economic evils. The democratic form of government requires a democratic form of society which safeguards the interest of the weaker sections of the society.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was born on November 14, 1889 at Allahabad and educated in England, at Harrow and Cambridge. In 1912, Nehru returned home to play a central role in India's struggle for freedom from British colonial rule, and then, as Prime Minister of independent India for seventeen years, went on to shape the nation's future as a modern, secular and democratic state. He died in office on May 27, 1964. Visionary and idealist, scholar and statesman of international stature, Nehru was also an outstanding writer. His three most renowned books – *An Autobiography*, *Glimpses of World History* and *The Discovery of India* – have already acquired the status of classics.

Bhimrao (later called B. R. Ambedkar) hailed from a poor family belonging to one of the Hindu untouchable communities in India, born on April 14 to Ramji and Bhimabai. His mother died when he was only six. A teacher named Ambedkar in the Satara High School in Dapoli, Maharashtra, loved Bhimrao very much and often fed him. As a

mark of love and respect to this teacher, he began to call himself Ambedkar. In 1907, Ambedkar passed his matriculation examination from Elphinstone High School, Bombay, obtaining just 282 out of 750 marks. This may appear a modest achievement to us, but for an untouchable on those days, it was certainly extraordinary. Though he subsequently made his mark as a scholar, he was average in his studies during student life. In June 1913, he left India for the United States of America and joined the Columbia University where he studied Economics, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Anthropology and Political Science. He obtained his M.A in 1915 and Ph.D in 1917. After completing his education in America, he joined the London School of Economics and Political Science. He had to leave the studies unfinished as his scholarship was terminated and was called back to India by the Dewan of Baroda. He was not treated well by the staff of Baroda State because of his low birth. One morning Ambedkar found himself threatened by a crowd with stick in their hands to beat him unless he left. Peons refused to serve even drinking water to him in the office. His high academic honours could not wash the stigma of untouchability from him. Subsequently, Ambedkar devoted his entire energies to the mission of uplifting the crores of untouchables. In 1918, Ambedkar joined Sydenham College as a Professor of Political Economics. His profundity of knowledge and convincing lectures earned him popularity among the students, but the social treatment remained unchanged. Some Gujarati professors objected to his drinking water from the pot reserved for the professional staff. Ambedkar again joined the London School of Economics and was awarded the Master of Science in June 1921. In 1922, he obtained the D. Sc degree. Ambedkar was now a Barrister reinforced by a London Doctorate in Science, an American Doctorate in Philosophy, and studies at Bonn University. He was thus well equipped to become, later, an eminent constitutionalist, distinguished parliamentarian, scholar and jurist, and above all the leader of the depressed classes. He attended three round Table Conferences in London (1930-1933) as the only representative of the depressed classes. He served as a member of the Governor General’s Executive Council (1942-46), and after Independence as Law Minister in the first Nehru Cabinet. As Law Minister, he piloted the Constituent Assembly of India.

3.2 PHILOSOPHY OF NEHRU

Nehru is a thinker of immense national and international importance. Through his writings, speeches, statements in Parliament, public platforms, international gatherings and elsewhere, he unleashed seminal and impregnated thoughts for the reordering of a developing democratic society. Philosophy, according to Nehru, has avoided many of the pitfalls of religion and encouraged thought and inquiry. But it has usually lived in its ivory tower concentrating on ultimate purposes and failed to link philosophical speculations with the life and practical problems of human. Philosophy is guided by logic and reason, which are too much the product of mind and unconcerned with facts of life.

Science

Science has steadily advanced its frontiers by rational demonstration and verification. It has definitely increased the corpus of human knowledge that is empirically verifiable. It has come to stay and has largely replaced the superstitions connected with religion. The scientists are the “miracle-workers of today.” However, science cannot reveal the whole truth and its method of observation cannot always be applicable to all varieties of experiences. But limitations of science should not deter a person from holding on to them because it is better to understand a part of truth and apply it to our lives than to understand nothing at all.

Religion

**Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru
and B.R. Amedhkar**

Nehru was always quite indifferent, unsympathetic, and even hostile in his comments on religion. Some describe him as an atheist, while others call him agnostic. The following is a critical reflection of Nehru on religion: “Religions have helped greatly in the development of humanity. They have laid down values and standards and have pointed out principles for the guidance of human life. But with all the good they have done, they have also tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas, and encouraged ceremonials and practices which soon lose all their original meaning and become mere routine. While impressing upon man the awe and mystery of the unknown that surrounds him on all sides, they have discouraged him from trying to understand not only the unknown but what might come in the way of social effort. Instead of encouraging curiosity and thought, they have preached a philosophy of submission to nature, to established churches, to the prevailing social order, and to everything that is. The belief in a supernatural agency which ordains everything has led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plane, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought and inquiry. Religion, though it has undoubtedly brought comfort to innumerable human beings and stabilized society by its values, has checked the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society.”

Communalism and Secularism

Communalism is the enemy of the unity and integrity of India. It is another name for groupism dividing humankind on some primitive notions and faiths. The alliance of religion and politics in the shape of communalism is a most dangerous alliance. Secularism is the only answer to this problem. In fact, secularism can save religion by preventing religious ideas from getting mixed up with the details of ordinary life and government. For tolerance and mutual respect are very essential not only for the safe governance of the country, but for the growth of these religions themselves. No religion can grow in an atmosphere of tension and conflict.

History

Nehru’s concept of history has often been categorized as “historical sociology” by several scholars. Although Nehru did not develop a coherent theory of evolution and change in history, he fully recognized the importance of objective forces, the economic factors, and the situational context of society in his concept of historical sociology. Historical sociology is unique because of its practical orientation rooted in his early education of science at Cambridge.

Democratic Socialism

Nehru stood for socialism leading to the creation of a classless society with equal opportunities for all. However, he was not an uncritical admirer of the type of socialism which prevailed in the West and wanted to modify its principles to suit the Indian conditions. He was against that type of socialism which regulated the lives of the individuals to the extent of losing their rightful autonomy and freedom. His democratic socialism aimed at adopting the means consistent with the principles of democracy.

Humanism

Corliss Lamont defines humanism as ‘a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science and democracy.’ Of the two varieties of humanism, liberal and Marxist, Nehru

was much closer to the liberal humanism. For despite being influenced by Marxian ideas, such as the polarity of opposing forces, the Gandhian influence was so deep and pervasive that Nehru could not subscribe to the violence implicit in the Marxist view of conflict resolution. Especially valuable for him was Gandhi’s ethics of ends and means, with its emphasis on right means as the only way to secure right ends.

The Constitution of India

Nehru was of the firm opinion that nothing was permanent in the Constitution of India. For he believed that the coming generation could change the basic features of the Constitution or could write a new Constitution. During one of the debates in the Constituent Assembly of India, Nehru said: “When the spirit of a nation breaks its bonds, it functions in peculiar ways. . . . It may be that the Constitution this House may frame may not satisfy free India; this House cannot bind down the next generation or the people who will succeed us in this task.”

Foreign Policy

Nehru’s foreign policy was based on the considerations of long-term interests of India. He was a crusader of peace and believed that the security of South-East Asia depended on a policy of non-alignment. The main objectives of the foreign policy of India are all contained in the speech of Nehru broadcast on September 7, 1946. Its salient objectives may be enumerated as follows: 1. To develop contact with other nations and co-operate with them in furtherance of world peace and freedom. 2. As far as possible to keep away from power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which led to two World Wars in the past and may again lead to a disaster on a vaster scale. 3. To work for the emancipation of the colonial people and the welfare and progress of dependent people towards self-government. 4. To utterly repudiate the Nazi doctrine of racialism. 5. To work for one world based on co-operation of free people in which various groups shall not exploit each other. 6. To have friendly and co-operative relations with England and other countries of the British Common Wealth.

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) How did Nehru understand communalism and secularism?
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- 2) What do you understand by Nehru’s concept of democratic socialism?
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3.3 PHILOSOPHY OF AMBEDKAR

Ambedkar was very much affected by Indian social system and ideologies and was influenced by the Western modernism. He used the methodology and strategy derived from the West to analyse Indian society. Though he admired the ideals of western liberalism and Marxism, he perceived their perfection in Buddhism. He suggested moderate ways to improve our political and economic system and radical methods for the social and religious reformation.

Social Philosophy

Social criticism is the foundation of Ambedkar’s philosophy and action. It revolves around the humiliation he and other members of the depressed class underwent every where in India as untouchables. His philosophy and struggle can be considered as workable social practices for the liberation of all people who are systematically separated and segregated from the mainstream.

Social conscience was regarded as the reliable safeguard of all rights. Social system, sometimes prevent people to realise the moral demand and follow blind cultural conditioning. Caste system made the people blind and immoral. Thus fundamental human rights and social justice have been violated in India for centuries. Indian social system is based on caste system. Caste system remains in society as culturally deep rooted, socially approved, religiously sanctioned and economically oppressive practice. Caste system is a hierarchically arranged social division of labour which is determined by the birth of a person. At present our Constitution has made many provisions to protect the members of lower castes from the possible atrocities by the upper castes. Yet segregation and atrocities against the lower castes take place. Then how much persecution and humiliation might have taken place at the time of Ambedkar when no such safeguards were available.

Ambedkar systematically evolved a thorough criticism against Chaturvarnyam. It is the determination and division of four castes on the basis of varna or colour. His attack upon caste system was not an out burst but principle based. “To me this Chaturvarnya with its old labels is utterly repellent and my whole being rebels against it. But I do not wish to rest my objection to Chaturvarnya on mere grounds of sentiments. There are more solid grounds on which I rely for my opposition to it.” He found caste system as out dated, impracticable, irrational and superstitious social practice. He narrated the damages done by it on the society, “Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste ridden and morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious.” For the decay of a society are not these evils enough? He fought consistently for human dignity and social equality. Ambedkar’s prime concern was the establishment of an egalitarian society. He set annihilation of caste as his goal. He believed that the real independence of India was possible only by it. He claimed that social progress and stability were possible in an equitable society.

Political Ideals and Socio-political Criticism

Ambedkar worked out an action plan for the establishment of social equality and made use of every opportunity to fulfill his dream. He was inspired by French Enlightenment. “If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on *Liberty, Equality*

and *Fraternity*.” An ideal society should permit vertical and horizontal mobility of every member of the society. In an ideal society, there should be avenue for divergent groups, different principles and many interests to be consciously communicated and shared. It works in a true 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.” How can a society that restricts the interaction among its people enjoy liberty? In such a society how can we establish democracy? Equality was an unthinkable desire in India, because, status, position and therefore merit were inherited. Upward movement was strictly prohibited.

In the Census of 1940, the dominant communities allured or forced the members of the depressed communities to register themselves as the members of the dominant communities for their political gain. In the power sharing it was number which gave political advantage to one community over another. The result was that the Census in India was deliberately cooked. “The Untouchables fell a victim to this stratagem and decided not to declare themselves as Untouchables in the Census return but to call themselves merely as Hindus. ... It reduced the number of Untouchables and swelled the ranks of the Hindus.” The upper caste Hindus integrated the Untouchables for their political gain and segregated them for exploitation. The Untouchables remained untouchable. Ambedkar and other leaders of the Untouchables were condemned as anti-Nationals. He was worried that “The politicians never realised that 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.” But Indian politicians were working only to maintain status quo, never challenged caste system. Ambedkar accused Gandhi of putting down all the aspirations of the depressed classes for social recognition.

In the Second Round Table Conference Ambedkar succeeded in convincing the British authorities on the need for a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes and got it. A separate electorate would mean that the Untouchables would vote for their own candidates and be allotted their votes separate from the Hindu majority. Gandhi felt that separate electorate would separate the Harijans from the Hindus. The thought that the Hindus would be divided pained him grievously. He started a fast unto death. Due to public pressure and the persuasion by national leaders, Ambedkar finally agreed to be satisfied with greater representation through reservation instead of separate electorate. The agreement in 1932 is known as Poona Pact.

When India became independent in August 1947, Babasaheb Ambedkar became First Law Minister of Independent India. The Constituent Assembly made him the chairman of the committee appointed to draft the constitution. His study of law, economics and politics, international level exposures and experiences within the nation made him the right person for this task. He studied the Constitutions of many countries and reflected on them from the Indian context, coordinated the thoughts of other members of the draft committee, explained each and every line of the draft in the Constituent Assembly to the satisfaction all members and brought out the best for India. Thus he is called the Architect of the Constitution.

Ambedkar, a liberal by bringing up, stressed parliamentary democracy along with state socialism for the welfare of all. He asserted the rule of law, equality of citizens,

people's participation in law making and policy decisions made him to accept parliamentary democracy. Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee could bring out the proper paths for the liberation of the depressed classes by introducing laws and acts for the promotion of social justice. He imprinted in the Constitution all his dreams through Directive Principles of the State Policy. His social thoughts are reflected in the Fundamental Rights

Economic Ideals and Social development

The underlying principle of Ambedkar's economic philosophy was the principles of Utilitarianism: greatest good of the largest number of people. An economic system was acceptable only if it had looked after the welfare of the majority who had been in the base of society. Ambedkar expressed the grievances of the rural poor, arranged mass movements and promoted workable programmes and laws for the upliftment of the weakest sections of society. The Independent Labour Party which he had founded in 1936 struggled for attaining human status for the workers belonging to the depressed classes.

Ambedkar's attack on the caste system was not merely aimed at challenging the hegemony of the so-called upper castes, but had a broader connotation of economic development. The vertical and horizontal mobility of the work force is essential for economic development. Caste system reduced the mobility of labour as well as capital. He said, "Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career." Selection under caste system was not on the basis of capacities, but on the ground of social status.

In his memorandum submitted to the British Government titled "States and Minorities" in 1947, Dr. Ambedkar laid down a strategy for India's economic development. The strategy placed "an obligation on the State to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth". The task of democracy would be fulfilled by achieving the social and economic dimensions of democracy. Its spirit was reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution.

As the Law Minister, Dr. Ambedkar fought vigorously for the passage of the Hindu Code Bill – most significant reform for women's rights in respect of marriage and inheritance. He resigned in September 1951 when the Bill did not pass in the Parliament.

Religious Criticism and Social Transformation

Ambedkar was consistent in his attack upon Hinduism, because it had inbuilt mechanism of oppression and exploitation. He believed that the Untouchables could never overcome their misery if they were attached to Hinduism. He worked hard to unite the depressed classes, separate them from Hindu fold and keep them as different entity in Indian society against the wish of national leaders like Gandhi and others. In the Yeola Conference of Dalits in 1935 Ambedkar told, "We have not been able to secure the barest of human rights... I am born a Hindu. I couldn't help it, but I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu." Ambedkar wrote in the article **Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables**, "Slavery, serfdom, villeinage have all vanished. But Untouchability still exists and bids fair to last as long as Hinduism will last... The

sufferings of the Untouchables ... are the result of a cold calculating Hinduism... The Untouchable is not merely despised but is denied all opportunities to rise.”

Ambedkar retorted to the argument of the protagonists of Chaturvarnya who claimed that it was based not on birth but on *guna* (worth) by questioning why they have been insisting upon labelling men as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. A learned man would be honoured without his being labelled a Brahmin. A soldier would be respected without his being designated a Kshatriya. “So long as these names continue, Hindus will continue to think of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra as hierarchical divisions of high and low, based on birth, and act accordingly. The Hindu must be made to unlearn all this. But how can this happen if the old labels remain and continue to recall to his mind old notions.” He despised Chaturvarnya as an impracticable and harmful system of social organization.

In the similar manner he suspected the Indian National Congress. “... whatever may be its title it is beyond question that the Congress is a body of middle class Hindus supplied by the Hindu Capitalists whose object is not to make Indians free but to be independent of British control and to occupy places of power now occupied by the British. If the kind of Freedom which the Congress wants was achieved there is no doubt that the Hindus would do to the Untouchables exactly what they have been doing in the past.” According to him India was not mature enough to undergo a political revolution. After sufficient level of social transformation, political independency would make an egalitarian society. Thus he wanted to have social revolution first and then political revolution or separate electorate for empowering the depressed classes and achieve political independency of the nation. Otherwise he feared that the upper caste Hindus might make use of the power to oppress the depressed classes. But India attained freedom without preparing her people to treat everybody as fraternal and equal. Therefore oppression and humiliation of the depressed classes continued and he was forced to educate and organize the members of the depressed classes to agitate for their liberation.

From history Ambedkar learned that religious revolutions strengthened oppressed communities to fight for freedom. “It was Puritanism, which won the war of American Independence, and Puritanism was a religious movement. The same was true of the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political power, they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by Prophet Mohammed. Even Indian History supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by Chandragupta was preceded by the religious and social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak.” He borrowed Buddha’s path after considering its theoretical and practical strengths such as a humanitarian and dominance free attitude and denial of doctrinal control. Ambedkar consulted many, threatened the National leaders and reformers with the idea of conversion, waited so long and finally on 15 October 1956, he and 8,00,000 followers converted themselves to Buddhism at *Deeksha Bhoomi, Nagpur*. At that time he prescribed 22 vows with the intention of complete severance of bond with Hinduism. The converts took oaths that they should not have any faith in the Hindu beliefs and practices. These vows asserted the faith in the Buddhists teachings, prescribed to follow moral life and demanded to deny superstitions, wasteful and meaningless rituals. He answered his critics, “My religious conversion is not inspired by any material motive. ... There is no other feeling than that of a spiritual feeling underlying my religious conversion. Hinduism does not appeal to

my conscience. My self-respect cannot assimilate Hinduism. ...Do not care for the opinion of those who foolishly ridicule the idea of conversion for material ends. Why should you live under the fold of that religion which has deprived you of honour, money, food and shelter?" Two months after the conversion ceremony, Ambedkar passed away. However, the religious movement that he set in motion has thrived, and it now includes around four million Buddhists.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru
and B.R. Amedhkar

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Why did Ambedkar want to separate the depressed classes from Hinduism?

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2) Why did Ambedkar suspect Gandhiji and the Congress?

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

As India’s first Prime minister and external affairs minister, Jawaharlal Nehru played a major role in shaping modern India’s government and political culture along with a solid philosophical vision of unity in diversity to which the Indian Christian philosophizing too is committed. He is praised for creating an inclusive secular democratic system of affirmative action to provide equal opportunities and rights for all citizens – members of all religions, diverse ethnic groups, various languages and dialects, minorities, women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Nevertheless, his stance as an unfailing nationalist led him also to implement policies which stressed unity among citizens while still appreciating their diversities. In this unit we have also tried to describe Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s social, political and economic thoughts, religious convictions and political strategies for the liberation of the weakest in the society. His social criticism was a demand for social justice. He felt the religious reformation and political movements of his time sidelined the social and economic exploitation in the name caste. Thus he started with independent movement and action programme for the liberation of the depressed classes. Organising the depressed classes and separate them from Hindu fold would be a workable strategy to liberate them. Otherwise they would be assimilated into Hinduism without getting liberation from caste oppression. He was attracted to Buddhist humanism, compassion, love and selfless collective living. He made use of political position and space available to him for providing provisions for liberation of

depressed classes and women.

3.5 KEY WORDS

- Caste system** : It is a hierarchically arranged social division of labour which is determined by the birth of a person.
- Chaturvarnya** : Hindu society was divided into four major hierarchic castes on the basis of varna or colour. Varna is understood as guna or merit. But caste was determined not on the merit of the person but by birth. Thus caste is inherited.
- Untouchables** : In Hindu society those who were not belonging to four caste groups were called outcastes and were treated as menial and manual workers and kept them at a distance from upper castes and their society. They were called Untouchables and the practice was known as untouchability.

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Website: www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb/lifeofbabasaheb.htm

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Communalism is the enemy of the unity and integrity of India. It is another name for groupism dividing humankind on some primitive notions and faiths. The alliance of religion and politics in the shape of communalism is a most dangerous alliance. Secularism is the only answer to this problem. In fact, secularism can save religion by preventing religious ideas from getting mixed up with the details of ordinary life and government. For tolerance and mutual respect are very essential not only for the safe governance of the country, but for the growth of these religions themselves. No religion can grow in an atmosphere of tension and conflict.
- 2) Nehru stood for socialism leading to the creation of a classless society with equal opportunities for all. However, he was not an uncritical admirer of the type of socialism which prevailed in the West and wanted to modify its principles to suit the Indian conditions. He was against that type of socialism which regulated the lives of the individuals to the extent of losing their rightful autonomy and freedom. His democratic socialism aimed at adopting the means consistent with the principles of democracy.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Caste system and Hinduism are intertwined. Though it was an out dated and impracticable concept, many leaders and organisations tried justify the system. They did not make any serious effort to remove it.
- 3) Gandhiji openly justified caste system as a traditional social division of labour. He did not accept separate electorate which would have been an opportunity for emancipation of the depressed classes. In the Congress and in the national affair upper castes' voice was prominent. Hindu reformers did not attack caste system.