

BR Ambedkar's three warnings on democracy

While addressing the constituent assembly on November 25, 1949, BR Ambedkar said India had known democracy in form of Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas and emphasized that their functioning was in many ways similar to a modern parliament. We lost this democracy with the passage of time. As India prepared itself for democracy on 26 January, 1950, Ambedkar issued three warnings about the subversion of democratic institutions in India.

The first warning- Doing away with all methods of revolution, including the Gandhian method of Satyagraha:

Ambedkar believed that while these methods were warranted under the British Raj, there was no place for them when constitutional methods were at our disposal after Independence. In 2011, Anna Hazare and his anti-corruption movement used Satyagraha to compel the government to pass the Jan Lokpal bill. It can be argued that this movement was partly responsible for the policy paralysis. It was also infringement of civil society on legislative prerogative. Most recently, Chief Minister of Delhi, tried to use Satyagraha as a tool to pressure the central government into granting full statehood to Delhi. These methods, irrespective of their noble agenda should be used as the final resort instead of the first one.

If we take a look at violent movements like the naxal movement, it is also an unconstitutional method. So all these forms of rebellions must be shunned.

The second warning of avoiding hero-worship:

Ambedkar believed hero-worship was a sure way to the degradation of democratic institutions, and would eventually lead to dictatorship. We can take the example of Indira Gandhi. Her followers regarded her as a god figure. Ultimately this worshipping led to the imposition of emergency in 1974. Now a days too, there is trend of hero worshipping in politics. That should be avoided.

The third warning:

India should not just remain content with political democracy but strive for social democracy as well. Ambedkar said if we as a society continue to deny equality in our social and economic life, then this could one day become a threat to our political democracy. Social democracy is a political, social and economic philosophy that supports economic and social interventions to promote social justice within the framework of a liberal democratic polity and a capitalist mixed economy.