

The Role of Babasaheb Ambedkar in Social Justice and Democracy: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, widely revered as Babasaheb, stands as a towering figure in India's socio-political evolution. His life's work represents a consistent, deeply intellectual, and moral struggle against caste-based discrimination and structural inequality. This study highlights Babasaheb's pioneering role in establishing the foundation for social justice and democracy in India. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, a social reformer, and a relentless advocate for the marginalized, his efforts have been instrumental in transforming India's democratic ethos to be inclusive and equitable. This paper also examines the structural roots of caste oppression and how Ambedkar's interventions through constitutional provisions, journalism, and political activism aimed at dismantling these inequalities.

Key Words : Social justice, Democracy, Caste System and Indian Society

INTRODUCTION

India's complex social structure, deeply rooted in caste-based hierarchy, has historically denied equal opportunities to vast sections of the population. In such a landscape, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emerged as an unparalleled advocate for the marginalized especially Dalits challenging centuries of oppression. His vision of social justice was not limited to legal equality but encompassed economic, social, cultural, and linguistic equity. Caste-based discrimination has been the bedrock of social inequality in India. The consequences are evident in the systemic exclusion of lower castes from wealth, education, and political power. Ambedkar recognized that these inequalities were not just social but institutional. He argued that unless caste was annihilated, democracy in India would remain superficial. The caste system, by assigning social status at birth, denied basic human dignity and opportunities to large segments of the population. Ambedkar was also aware of the subtler forms of inequality particularly linguistic and cultural exclusion. Caste, as a system has continued to reproduce itself through endogamy. Those who strive for the democratic transformation of Indian society, irrespective

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of political ideology, have to fight against the prevalent caste. Ambedkar has always been for establishment a society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity (Ambedkar, 2013). Dominant castes controlled literary spaces, awards, and official languages, often marginalizing voices from oppressed backgrounds. Ambedkar's own writings challenged this cultural hegemony and created space for alternative narratives that centered Dalit experiences. Even today, Ambedkar's vision is invoked in debates around affirmative action, constitutional morality, and social justice. His thoughts remain central in critiquing the failures of the state to uphold equality and in guiding grassroots movements for rights and recognition. Social justice is the spirit and vision of the Indian Constitution. It is the duty of the state to secure a social order in which the legal system of the nation promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and, in particular, ensures that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Raghavendra, 2016).

Understanding of Social Justice and Democracy:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, widely known as Babasaheb, understood "social justice" as the foundation of a just and equal society where every individual regardless of caste, class, gender, or religion has equal rights and opportunities. For him, social justice meant liberty, equality, and fraternity in everyday life, not just in law or politics. He believed that a society based on the caste system could never be just, as it denied dignity, self-respect, and freedom to millions. Ambedkar insisted that true social justice requires the annihilation of caste and the establishment of a society where people are treated as equals in all spheres like economic, political, educational, and religious. He also linked social justice to economic democracy, where resources are fairly distributed and everyone has the means to live with dignity. In his vision, social justice is not only a legal or political ideal but a moral obligation to ensure that no one is oppressed or excluded from the progress of society. Ambedkar's work laid the foundation for social democracy in India, emphasizing equality, justice, and the need for systemic change to eradicate caste-based discrimination. His legacy continues to inspire movements for social justice and equality in contemporary society (Dwivedi and Sinha, 2016).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar defined "democracy" not just as a form of government, but as a way of life rooted in the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. For Babasaheb, democracy meant more than periodic elections or majority rule, it required the dignity of the individual, mutual respect, and social and economic justice for all. He believed that political democracy (having the right to vote and participate in governance) is incomplete without social and economic democracy, where all citizens enjoy equal access to education, employment, and resources. Ambedkar emphasized that real democracy can only exist when there is no domination of one class or caste over another, and when every individual has the opportunity to grow and express themselves freely. He also warned that without justice and equality in daily life, democracy would remain superficial and fragile. Thus, for Ambedkar, democracy was a continuous struggle to build a society where everyone could live with dignity and self-respect.

Dr. Ambedkar's Vision of Social Justice:

Ambedkar's definition of social justice extended beyond distributive justice; it included

the dismantling of social hierarchies and the establishment of dignity and equal rights for all citizens. Moreover, he believed that social justice could only be realized through affirmative action policies, fundamental rights, and directives for state policy. Also, separate electorates and later reservations to ensure political voice for the marginalized. Not only but, he emphasized the importance of education for Dalits and other oppressed communities as a tool for liberation. Although, one of the most influential drafters of India's Constitution, Ambedkar enshrined therein the principles of freedom and non-discrimination. The Constitution laid the groundwork for reservations, India's sole affirmative action policy. It provided for a future system that through amendments would eventually reserve seats in legislatures, government jobs, and education for scheduled castes (SCs) (formerly called untouchables) and scheduled tribes (STs) (indigenous formerly nomadic groups). Ambedkar established inclusive educational initiatives, including learn while you earn options, and overseas education scholarships for historically marginalized groups, who could not dream of accessing these opportunities prior to this time. He fought tirelessly to raise the status of women and free them from encumbrances standing in their way so that they could have all the rights and opportunities of male citizens. More than pointing people in a direction, he helped people see they could think beyond accepting miserable conditions and instead plan a way of life rooted in dignity (Halli, S. C. and Jaffrelot, C. 2005). Rawls' concept of "justice as fairness," which prioritizes equal liberties and fair opportunities over mere utility. It discusses how this framework seeks to ensure that inequalities are only permissible if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Sen believes justice should be assessed based on what individuals are actually able to do and be, rather than solely on the distribution of resources. Ambedkar's arguments for human equality and the need for social transformation to achieve justice. It emphasizes that Ambedkar critiques the notion of equality of opportunity, advocating instead for preferential treatment for disadvantaged groups to ensure their representation and agency in society (Rodrigues, 2011).

Democracy as a Tool for Social Change:

Ambedkar viewed democracy not just as a form of government, but as a way of life grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity. For him, true democracy would dismantle social hierarchies and empower all citizens, regardless of caste, to participate equally in public life.

He distinguished between formal equality (equality in law) and substantive equality (equality in outcome and opportunity). Ambedkar's policies aimed to bridge this gap through proactive measures. Social and Economic Democracy and Removal of Untouchability" makes several significant contributions to the understanding of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on democracy and the caste system. The emphasizes Ambedkar's perspective that democracy is not just about majority rule or representation. Instead, it is a tool for peaceful change and social justice, which is crucial for the progress of marginalized communities, particularly the untouchables. Also, it highlights Ambedkar's belief that true democracy cannot exist without the removal of untouchability. The paper argues that the progress of the nation is contingent upon addressing social inequalities and injustices, particularly those faced by the untouchables. Although, delves into Ambedkar's analysis of the caste system, where he critiques Hindu religious philosophy. It discusses how he believed that the abolition of untouchability is

intrinsically linked to dismantling the caste system, which is rooted in religious notions. Moreover, outlines essential factors for the effective operation of democracy, such as education, economic progress, and political strength. It suggests that these elements are vital for empowering untouchables and ensuring their participation in the democratic process. Not only but, the paper discusses the importance of self-respect among untouchables as a critical factor in their struggle for rights and recognition. It posits that self-respect is foundational for achieving social and economic democracy. Thus, provides a comprehensive analysis of Ambedkar's thoughts on democracy and the removal of untouchability, emphasizing the interconnectedness of social justice, education, and economic empowerment in achieving true democracy. (Jaiswal, 2012) The discusses Ambedkar's pivotal role in advocating for social justice and democracy, emphasizing his belief that true democracy requires social democracy, which encompasses liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar challenged the caste system, arguing that it perpetuated injustice and inequality. He proposed constitutional provisions to ensure rights for marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits. His vision aimed to create a just society by dismantling caste hierarchies and promoting equal opportunities, thus laying the foundation for a more inclusive democracy in India (Ranjithkumar, 2011). He viewed caste not only as a social evil but as a direct obstruction to the development of true democratic values. Ambedkar was one of the very important political thinkers and social revolutionaries that modern India has produced as mentioned sociological approach to abolish untouchability. Not only but, he picked up the Mahad water tank issue, temple entry, opening of educational intuitions for Dalit and backward castes as entry points to attack Brahmanical hegemonic theory for exploitation, control and manipulation of the Dalit masses (Dwivedi and Sinha, 2016).

Constitutional Provisions as Instruments of Social Change:

The introduction of reservations, safeguards for minorities, and equality before law represent radical interventions aimed at correcting historical injustices. The main goal of the study is to analyze and evaluate critically the idea of B.R. Ambedkar, the great Indian constitution maker, regarding Indian democracy and to capture the position of Ambedkar on issues whose relevance is even felt at present. Analyzing the idea of democracy of Ambedkar in details, it can be found out that Ambedkar had unshakeable faith in democracy. In his conception of exploitation less society, democracy has an extra-ordinary role which he defined as one person, one vote'; and 'one vote, one value'. Democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision-making relating to her/him, democracy means liberty, equality and fraternity - Ambedkar's definition of democracy had such a tone. This research gives closer and analytical insight into the thoughts of Ambedkar and provides an answer to the question of whether we, the Indian, achieve religious tolerance, human equality and freedom, true democracy, gender respect in the society, justice and peace in the light of political philosophy of Ambedkar whose memory will ever guide the nation on the path of justice, liberty and equality (Ray and Ray, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a literature study approach to examine the role of Dr. B.R.

Ambedkar in advancing social justice and democracy in India. A literature study involves systematically reviewing existing academic and historical sources to gather insights related to the research questions. The main objective is to identify, synthesize, and analyze existing knowledge, theories, and interpretations concerning Ambedkar's contributions as a social reformer, legal architect, and democratic visionary. The study is based entirely on secondary data sources, including academic journal articles, historical texts, biographies, speeches, government documents, constitutional records, and digital archives. Supplementary materials such as newspaper articles, documentaries, educational websites, and online databases are also referenced to provide a comprehensive understanding of Ambedkar's legacy and impact (Seelam, 2016).

For data analysis, the research employs a content analysis method, allowing for a thematic examination of key concepts like caste abolition, democratic inclusion, and human rights advocacy. Content analysis helps not only in identifying factual contributions but also in interpreting the ideological patterns and discourses emerging from Ambedkar's writings and policies.

The procedural steps followed in the content analysis are:

Problem Formulation:

The research problem focuses on understanding how Ambedkar's work has influenced India's journey toward social justice and democratic governance.

Media Selection:

Primary and secondary sources with historical and academic credibility are selected for relevance to Ambedkar's role and philosophy.

Operational Definitions:

Central terms such as "social justice," "Dalit empowerment," and "democratic reform" are defined to guide the analysis.

Coding and Reliability Check:

Themes such as caste abolition, constitutional democracy, education for the marginalized, and political participation are used as coding categories.

Data Analysis and Reporting:

The findings are interpreted and presented descriptively to highlight Ambedkar's multi-dimensional role in shaping modern India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ambedkar's Vision of Social Justice:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a towering figure in Indian history, dedicated his life to dismantling the deeply entrenched caste hierarchy and advocating for a society rooted in equality and justice. His early experiences with caste discrimination shaped his lifelong mission to uplift marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits, and challenge the orthodoxy of Hindu

social structures. Through foundational works like *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar exposed the moral and structural injustices of the caste system and argued for its complete eradication as essential to achieving real democracy. He emphasized the inseparable link between social justice and democracy, asserting that without equality and human dignity, political democracy remains hollow (Sen, 2008).

Architect of Democratic Foundations:

Ambedkar's most enduring legacy lies in his role as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, where he embedded principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice. Key democratic elements such as Fundamental Rights, Affirmative Action (Reservations), Protection against Untouchability (Article 17) and provisions for minority representation were direct results of his vision for an inclusive India. His interpretation of democracy extended beyond electoral processes. He envisioned democracy as a way of life involving social ethics, equal access to opportunities, and respect for human dignity (Thorat and Kumar, 2008).

Empowerment Through Education and Reform:

Ambedkar championed education as the key tool for Dalit emancipation. He believed that knowledge could liberate the oppressed and insisted on educational reform as a prerequisite for social reform. His establishment of educational institutions and emphasis on higher learning among marginalized communities laid the groundwork for generational upliftment. Additionally, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a radical spiritual and political act aimed at rejecting caste-based oppression and embracing a path grounded in morality, equality, and compassion (Sharma, 2015).

Contemporary Relevance:

In modern India, Ambedkar's ideas continue to resonate. Movements for caste equity, gender justice, and minority rights often draw upon his writings and leadership. His role as a social justice icon and democratic reformer remains central to academic discourse, public policy, and grassroots activism (Griffiths *et al.*, 2004).

Conclusion:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's role in shaping India's democratic and social fabric is both foundational and transformative. His relentless pursuit of equality through education, constitutional reform, and social activism positioned him as a pioneer of social justice in modern India. His legacy serves not only as a historical milestone but also as a living framework for addressing enduring inequalities. As India continues to grapple with caste-based exclusion, Ambedkar's principles remain vital in advancing the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar did not merely seek political freedom; he fought for dignified living for all, especially the marginalized. His legacy underscores that a truly democratic society must be rooted in justice, inclusion, and equal opportunity. As India continues to confront social disparities, Ambedkar's vision remains a guiding force for building a more equitable and democratic nation. His vision of social justice deeply rooted in democratic ideals continues to serve as a

guiding light in India's journey toward a more equitable society. Understanding and implementing his ideas remain crucial in addressing persistent inequalities and realizing the promise of true democracy.

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