

The Relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Thoughts in Modern India

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ABSTRACT

A towering intellect, jurist, economist, and social reformer, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar continues to be one of the most influential people in contemporary Indian history. The issues of caste, social justice, economic inequality, and constitutional government are still prevalent in modern India, where his thoughts and ideas continue to resonate. In the context of modern India, this study examines the enduring applicability of Dr. Ambedkar's ideology, emphasizing the ways in which his vision of social democracy, constitutional morality, education, and economic development is still essential for addressing contemporary issues.

Keywords: Relevance, Reformer, Justice, Caste, Thoughts, Education, Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, was not just a political figure but a philosopher, reformer, and visionary whose ideas were deeply rooted in the values of justice, equality, and liberty. Born into a Dalit family, he faced social discrimination that shaped his intellectual journey and moral commitment to the upliftment of the oppressed. In modern India, his thoughts are gaining renewed attention as the country grapples with persistent social and economic disparities. This paper examines the relevance of Ambedkar's thought in the 21st century, focusing on his views on social justice, caste eradication, constitutional democracy, education, gender equality, and economic reform.

Social Justice and Caste Annihilation:

Dr. Ambedkar's unwavering struggle against caste prejudice and his support for social justice are among his most significant achievements. Inequalities based on caste still exist in many areas, including politics, education, employment, and social life, even though the constitution offers protection against them. In contemporary India, where caste-based violence and discrimination continue

to be commonplace, Ambedkar's cry to "annihilate caste" is especially pertinent. His works, notably *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), offer a moral and political compass for lawmakers and activists who want to dismantle ingrained hierarchies. Ambedkar's idea of compensatory justice underpins affirmative action laws like reservations in education and public employment, which are still at the core of the discussion on equity and inclusion. However, the resistance to these policies from certain sections of society reflects the ongoing tension between constitutional ideals and societal realities. Ambedkar's insistence on the moral imperative of social reform before political power is a lesson still largely unheeded (Keer, 1971).

Architect of Constitution and Democracy:

Ambedkar's role as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution ensured that the document was infused with liberal democratic values. He emphasized the importance of constitutional morality adherence not just to the letter but also the spirit of the Constitution. In his final speech to the Constituent Assembly, he warned against the dangers of hero-worship in politics and the degradation of democratic institutions. These concerns are particularly pertinent today, as India grapples with issues of institutional independence, majoritarianism, and the

politicization of civil services (Nirmal, 1991).

Ambedkar's belief that a democracy is only as good as its ability to deliver justice and dignity to its weakest members continues to challenge India's democratic ethos. His thought urges the country to critically evaluate how far democratic governance has translated into genuine social and economic empowerment.

Economic Thought and Inclusive Development:

Ambedkar argued that political democracy without economic democracy is incomplete. He believed that liberty without economic security is meaningless. He supported labor rights, state ownership of key industries, and land reforms to ensure a just economic order. In today's context of widening income disparities and capitalist excesses, Ambedkar's economic philosophy offers a counter-narrative focused on equity, social welfare, and redistribution. Though less frequently discussed, Ambedkar's economic thought was both progressive and ahead of its time. Trained in economics at Columbia University and the London School of Economics, Ambedkar critiqued both colonial economic policy and indigenous feudal structures.

He supported labour rights, land reforms, and state-led industrialization. His focus on the financial autonomy of marginalized communities stemmed from his conviction that political rights are meaningless without economic security. Ambedkar's model of inclusive development takes on paramount significance in light of India's current economic issues, which include growing unemployment, rural poverty, and rising income inequality. His support for the nationalization of vital industries and the expansion of the public sector, while criticized by neoliberal economists, is echoed in today's discussions about privatization and corporate responsibility. His perspective emphasizes the role of the government in fostering fair development (Rodrigues, 2002).

Education as the Key to Empowerment:

"Educate, agitate, organize" Ambedkar's clarion call for emancipation underscores the centrality of education in his thought. He believed that education is the most powerful tool to dismantle caste hierarchies and empower the oppressed. While India has made strides in expanding access to education, significant gaps remain, especially among Dalits, Adivasis, and women. Ambedkar's insistence on quality, accessible, and secular education continues to be relevant in a time when educational

institutions face funding cuts, ideological interference, and systemic exclusion. The digital divide during the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the need for educational reforms that prioritize equity, inclusion, and critical thinking tenets deeply embedded in Ambedkar's educational philosophy (Narendra, 1991).

Reservations and Affirmative Action as the Rise of Dalit Assertion:

Ambedkar championed reservations in education and employment as a means to compensate for historical injustices and provide a level playing field. Despite controversies and resistance, reservations remain a cornerstone of social justice policy in India. The demand for affirmative action in the private sector, and for other marginalized groups, shows the continued relevance of this instrument. Ambedkar's legacy has inspired political assertion and cultural pride among Dalits. Movements like Bahujan politics, Dalit literature, and Ambedkarite festivals have transformed the socio-political landscape. These are not just acts of remembrance but forms of resistance and reclamation (Satyapal, 2010).

Caste and Challenges for Indian Democracy:

The effects of caste on the Indian society are multifarious and vicious. The Indian society has a prevailed caste system that is the cause of all ills. Caste does not permit a true spirit, but promotes a narrow caste spirit. We do not have a united society, but many societies each caste being a separate society. Even in the same caste there are many sub-castes, many mini societies. The result is disastrous; endless division in society. Caste is antisocial in spirit. Caste has thwarted the emergence of what the sociologists calls consciousness of kind. It is extremely a matter of pain when it comes to reveal that Indian society, some people in the group are traditionally marked as criminals. They become the targets of the police and are suspected and often tortured by the police for a crime even they did not committed that crime. The cause of all this is the caste system. Many killings, kidnappings, murders, rapes and all sorts of social unrest are caused by the caste system (Ambedkar, B.R 1916: 25).

The challenges of casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism are major threats to Indian polity. They weaken the functioning and stability of democratic system. The caste system, which presumably originated in the division of labour in the ancient society, has become

a more or less rigid group classification, based on birth. Have you not experienced the role of casteism in your own life and in your society? You will agree that the most detrimental and inhuman aspect of the caste discrimination is the practice of untouchability, which is continuing in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. This has led to segregation of so called low castes or Dalits, depriving them of education and other social benefits. The Dalit castes have been typically reflected as the performer of menial labour and some of the hardest physical activity in society. Casteism displays a negative role even in the democratic political conversation. In fact, casteism has become notorious as a strategy of exploitation of caste consciousness for narrow political gains. The caste system acts against the roots of democracy. The democratic facilities - like fundamental rights relating to equality, freedom of speech, expression and association, participation in the electoral process, free media and press, and even legislative forums - are often misused to allign castes identity (Ambedkar, B.R 1945: 44).

Casteism has also been contributing towards continuation of socio-economic inequalities. It is true that India has been an unequal society since time immemorial. The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward classes have suffered down the ages from socio-economic deprivations. There are enormous inequalities in our society, which are posing a serious challenge to Indian democracy. During elections, a large number of voters give weight to the caste and religion of the candidate. Political parties also keep in mind the caste or religion of a person while distributing tickets for the election. Representatives elected on the basis of caste or religion work for the welfare of the people belonging only to their caste or religion (Hutton, 1963: 55).

Gender Justice and Women's Rights:

Ambedkar was a strong advocate for gender equality. As the Minister of Law and Justice, he was instrumental in drafting the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to reform Hindu personal laws and grant greater rights to women in matters of inheritance, marriage, and divorce. Though the bill faced stiff opposition and was only partially implemented during his lifetime, it laid the groundwork for future legal reforms. In modern India, where gender-based violence, wage disparity, and under representation of women in political spaces remain serious issues, Ambedkar's early advocacy for gender justice provides a crucial framework for feminist movements. His

understanding of the intersectionality of caste and gender remains particularly significant, offering a lens to examine the layered oppression faced by Dalit women today (Larbeer, 2003).

Religion and Moral Philosophy:

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956, along with millions of his followers, was not merely a religious act but a profound political and moral statement. He rejected the caste hierarchy embedded in Hinduism and turned to Buddhism for its emphasis on rationality, compassion, and social equality. In the current socio-political climate, marked by religious polarization and intolerance, Ambedkar's reinterpretation of religion as a tool for moral and social reform is deeply relevant. His version of Buddhism offers an ethical alternative to divisive identity politics, emphasizing the need for personal and societal transformation based on reason and humanity (Ambedkar, B. R. 1943).

Political Participation and Representation:

Ambedkar was a staunch believer in the importance of political participation for marginalized groups. His founding of the Scheduled Castes Federation and later the Republican Party of India was driven by the need for an independent political voice for the oppressed. In today's context, where Dalit political representation is both increasing and fragmenting, Ambedkar's thought challenges the co-optation of his legacy by political parties and underscores the need for substantive representation that goes beyond symbolic gestures. His emphasis on political education and the ethical responsibility of elected representatives continues to be a vital touchstone for evaluating the quality of governance in modern India (Ketkar, 1990).

Environmental Justice and Sustainability:

Though not an environmentalist in the modern sense, Ambedkar's ideas about public health, urban planning, and resource distribution have implications for environmental justice. His work as Bombay's Municipal Commissioner included efforts to improve sanitation, housing, and water supply issues that remain critical in the context of climate change and urbanization.

His belief in state responsibility for basic human needs aligns with modern environmental justice movements that seek to link ecological concerns with social equity. Ambedkar's integrated vision of rights and

responsibilities can inform current debates on sustainable development (Iyer, 1989).

Global Relevance and Comparative Perspective:

Ambedkar's thought is increasingly studied in global contexts, particularly in relation to race, minority rights, and postcolonial justice. His ideas on social democracy, minority rights, and constitutionalism resonate with movements for racial justice, indigenous rights, and anti-discrimination laws worldwide.

Conclusion:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thought remains a powerful guide for navigating the complexities of modern India. His vision of a society rooted in justice, equality, and fraternity is far from being fully realized. As India continues its journey as a democracy, his ideas offer not just a critique of ongoing inequities but also a roadmap for transformative change. From caste abolition to constitutional ethics, from economic democracy to educational reform, Ambedkar's legacy challenges every citizen and policymaker to build a more inclusive, humane, and enlightened society. Reclaiming and reinterpreting Ambedkar in today's context is not merely an academic exercise, it is a political, moral, and social necessity. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas are not relics of the past but living frameworks for justice, democracy, and equality. In a nation still grappling with caste hierarchies, economic disparities, and democratic backsliding, his vision offers a guiding light. As he famously said, "We are Indians, firstly and lastly." That statement remains a call for unity in diversity, grounded in justice and human dignity.

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