



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Champion of Social Justice and Equality

Sasmita Behera

MA in Political Science

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Email: sasmitabehera078@gmail.com

Manas Ranjan Behera

Assistant Professor of Political Science (Teacher Education)

U.G. CTE, Baripada, Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Email: manas93ind@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a significant person in India's socio-political history, was instrumental in establishing the nation's contemporary principles of social justice and equality. This research study examines his accomplishments, emphasizing his unwavering efforts for the advancement of marginalised populations, particularly the Dalits, and his aspiration for an equitable society. Utilising secondary sources such as historical texts, scholarly articles, and official documents, the paper examines Ambedkar's significant contributions, particularly his involvement in draughting the Indian Constitution, where he incorporated provisions for social justice. It also analyses his promotion of education, economic reforms, and equal rights, highlighting his crusade against untouchability and caste-based discrimination. This study seeks to critically examine Ambedkar's socio-political ideology and its lasting significance in modern India, where inequality and prejudice continue to exist. The research underscores the impact of Ambedkar's principles on several social movements and their on-going inspiration for the pursuit of an

inclusive and equitable society. The study provides an in-depth analysis of Ambedkar's legacy as an advocate for human rights and social fairness through a review of secondary literature, highlighting its relevance for contemporary policy-making.

Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, often referred to as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was born on April 14, 1891, in the town of Mhow, located in contemporary Madhya Pradesh, India. His formative years were characterised by poverty, social marginalisation, and caste-based prejudice, which significantly shaped his subsequent endeavours as an advocate for social justice and equality.

Born within the Mahar caste, deemed "untouchable" within the stringent caste system of India, Ambedkar encountered significant adversities from an early age. Although he was an intelligent and curious child, he endured persistent humiliation and isolation at school. Similar to other children from marginalised communities, Ambedkar was prohibited from sitting in the classroom with upper-caste pupils, had to sit outdoors on a mat, and frequently denied access to water and other essential facilities. These initial encounters with caste-based prejudice would profoundly impact him and galvanise his enduring struggle against the caste system (Kataria, 2012).

Ambedkar's father, Ramji Maloji Sakpal, served as a Subedar in the British Indian Army, affording the family a degree of economic stability that enabled Ambedkar to pursue his studies despite significant challenges. His father, a stringent disciplinarian and an adherent of the social reformer Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, imparted to young Bhimrao the principles of education and social reform. He guaranteed that Ambedkar obtained a formal education, which was uncommon for youngsters from untouchable villages during that period.

In 1907, Ambedkar successfully completed his matriculation exams at Elphinstone High School in Bombay (now Mumbai), distinguishing himself as one of the few individuals from his caste to reach this achievement. His academic excellence was acknowledged by the Maharaja of Baroda, who granted him a scholarship for advanced studies. Ambedkar obtained a degree in economics and political science from Bombay University in 1912; but, his insatiable quest for knowledge compelled him to pursue additional studies outside (Bardia, 2009).

In 1913, Ambedkar relocated to the United States to enrol at Columbia University on a Baroda State Scholarship. He obtained his Master's degree in Economics in 1915, subsequently earning a PhD in 1927. His residence in the U.S. profoundly impacted him. At Columbia, Ambedkar encountered the principles of democracy, liberty, and equality, which intensified his commitment to combat social inequities in India. His academic milieu also acquainted him with distinguished intellectuals and social thinkers, whose writings would shape his perspectives on caste and social revolution.

Ambedkar's scholarly pursuits continued beyond that point. Upon finishing his schooling in the United States, he relocated to London, where he matriculated at the London School of Economics (LSE) and Gray's Inn to pursue legal studies. He earned a DSc in Economics at LSE and then became a barrister after being called to the bar. His profound comprehension of economics, law, and political theory would subsequently be essential in influencing his endeavours as a social reformer, politician, and architect of the Indian Constitution.

Ambedkar's formative years and schooling were characterised by adversity, determination, and a steadfast dedication to learning. These formative experiences influenced his vision for a just and egalitarian society, where individuals would be evaluated based on their ability rather than their caste or social status. His personal encounters with prejudice, along with his exposure to global principles of liberty and justice, established the basis for his enduring struggle against caste-based oppression and his advocacy for the rights of marginalised groups (Rajasekhariah and Jayaraj, 1991).

Ambedkar's Struggle against Caste-Based Discrimination

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's fight against caste-based discrimination is a fundamental element of his life and legacy. As a member of the "untouchable" Mahar caste, Ambedkar directly encountered the profound social, economic, and psychological effects of the caste system. His enduring struggle against this system was not merely personal but sought the collective liberation of millions suffering to discrimination and persecution in India. Ambedkar emerged as the preeminent leader of the anti-caste movement in India by his advocacy, activity, and intellectual achievements, confronting established social hierarchies and striving to deconstruct the pervasive structures of caste-based inequity (Bhimraj, 2020).

- **Early Experiences of Caste-Based Discrimination**

Ambedkar's life exemplified the widespread prevalence of caste discrimination within Indian society. Born in 1891 within the Mahar community, he endured the systematic dehumanisation associated with the designation of "untouchable." His early education was characterised by the marginalisation and humiliation experienced by untouchable children. At school, he was segregated from upper-caste children and frequently denied access to water and essential utilities. His experiences exemplified the caste system's cruelty, which not only deprived individuals of their fundamental human rights but also aimed to institutionalise inequity (Sinha, 2015).

These encounters profoundly impacted Ambedkar, intensifying his resolve to confront and eradicate the caste system. His experiences of humiliation at every juncture, despite his academic excellence, led him to see that knowledge alone would not suffice to transcend caste barriers. He recognised that combating caste discrimination necessitated systematic reform aimed at dismantling the fundamental foundations of social hierarchy in India.

- **Mahad Satyagraha (1927)**

The Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 was a pivotal event in Ambedkar's anti-caste movement. This protest was orchestrated by Ambedkar to affirm the entitlement of untouchables to utilise public water resources. During that period, untouchables were prohibited from accessing water from public wells or tanks utilised by upper castes. Ambedkar orchestrated the Mahad Satyagraha to affirm the untouchables' entitlement to utilise water from the Chavdar Tank in Mahad, Maharashtra.

The protest transcended the issue of water; it represented a broader struggle for equality, decency, and access to public areas. Ambedkar asserted that untouchables possess the right to access the same water sources as others, as a fundamental human right. During the satyagraha, violent opposition from upper-caste factions underscored the entrenched nature of caste-based biases. Ambedkar's leadership in this movement represented a pivotal moment, signifying the onset of a more structured and assertive advocacy for the rights of untouchables (Suradkar, 2017).

- **Manusmriti Dahan**

Subsequent to the Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar undertook a decisive action to confront the underpinnings of caste discrimination by incinerating copies of the Manusmriti, the archaic Hindu scripture that had institutionalised caste-based societal systems. The Manusmriti legitimised the caste system, relegating certain people to inferior status and rights while asserting the dominance of the

Brahmin caste. For Ambedkar, the poem embodied the logical and religious foundations of caste discrimination.

In 1927, Ambedkar's public incineration of the Manusmriti conveyed a potent repudiation of the religious and social validity of caste. He contended that the abolition of the caste system necessitated not only political and social reform but also a repudiation of the religious and cultural traditions that upheld it. This act of disobedience incited extensive debate and controversy while simultaneously invigorating the anti-caste movement, motivating numerous untouchables to challenge the scriptural authority that justified their subjugation (Rokade, 2022).

- **Temple Entry Movement**

A notable event in Ambedkar's fight against caste discrimination was the Temple Entry Movement, which sought to allow untouchables access to Hindu temples, a right exclusive to the higher castes. In Hindu civilisation, untouchables were prohibited from accessing temples, hence exacerbating their social marginalisation and classification as "impure." Ambedkar regarded this as a profound injustice, as it stripped untouchables of their religious liberty and their fundamental human dignity.

Ambedkar orchestrated demonstrations advocating for temple access for untouchables, with the most prominent being the campaign at the Kalaram Temple in Nashik in 1930. He guided thousands of untouchables to the shrine, but they encountered vehement resistance from orthodox Hindu factions. Despite its initial lack of success, the campaign highlighted the issue of religious discrimination and showcased Ambedkar's dedication to achieving equal rights across all aspects of life, including religious customs (Queen, 2008).

- **Political Mobilization and the Poona Pact**

Ambedkar's endeavours to address caste-based inequality extended beyond social movements alone. He acknowledged the significance of political power as a mechanism to elevate untouchables and other marginalised communities. In 1932, during discussions with the British administration regarding electoral changes in India, Ambedkar championed separate electorates for untouchables, enabling them to autonomously select their representatives. Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed this proposition, apprehensive that it would fragment Hindu society.

Gandhi initiated a hunger strike to contest distinct electorates, resulting in the Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi. This agreement abolished distinct electorates while guaranteeing reserved seats for untouchables in legislative assemblies. Despite Ambedkar's partial dissatisfaction with the outcome, the Poona Pact represented a pivotal juncture in his political trajectory, illustrating his pragmatism and adeptness at negotiation within the limitations of the colonial political framework (Rodrigues, 2017).

- **Legacy and Contributions**

Ambedkar's fight against caste-based discrimination culminated in his paramount achievement: the formulation of the Indian Constitution. In his capacity as head of the Draughting Committee, he ensured that the Constitution enshrined fundamental rights and forbade discrimination based on caste, religion, or gender. The affirmative action measures, including reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in education and employment, were a direct consequence of Ambedkar's endeavours to attain social justice for marginalised groups.

Ambedkar's opposition to caste was not merely a campaign for social reform but a comprehensive movement for human dignity, equality, and justice. His contributions established the groundwork for contemporary India's stance on caste, and his influence persists in motivating movements advocating for the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities. He serves as an emblem of defiance against social injustice, and his contributions to the anti-caste movement are regarded as some of the most pivotal social reforms in Indian history (Radhakrishnan, 1991).

Ambedkar's Role as a Legal Luminary

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a seminal figure in India's legal and social history, employed his extensive legal expertise to champion the rights of marginalised populations and establish the groundwork for an equitable society. Ambedkar, possessing a distinguished academic foundation in law and economics, emerged as a notable lawyer and a significant constitutional architect. His contributions as a legal expert revolutionised India's legal framework, tackling matters of social justice, equality, and fundamental rights. His efforts extended beyond legislative draughting; he redefined the legal framework of post-colonial India, prioritising inclusion and human rights as fundamental principles of governance.

- **Early Legal Career and Commitment to Justice**

Ambedkar's legal career commenced upon his return to India from London, when he obtained qualifications as a barrister from Gray's Inn and a doctorate in economics from the London School of Economics. Having seen and observed the oppression of caste discrimination throughout his life, Ambedkar was keenly cognisant of the necessity for legal and political reform to eradicate social inequities. His legal expertise and personal experiences compelled him to create a strong framework of rights and protections for marginalised people, transforming the law into an effective instrument for social reform (Bardia, 2009).

His initial legal career was characterised by his dedication to advocating for the rights of "untouchables" and pursuing social justice. Ambedkar championed numerous civil rights cases, concentrating on socioeconomic issues that discriminated against lower castes and other marginalised communities. As a legal scholar, he authored significant studies and arguments that contested the conventional frameworks of caste-based discrimination. His writings criticised societal norms, legal constraints, and religious concepts that upheld caste hierarchies, establishing a basis for his subsequent legal reforms (Narain, 2017).

- **Leader of the Anti-Caste Movement and Legal Reforms**

Ambedkar's legal advocacy was essential in the anti-caste movement, as he employed his legal expertise to confront particular injustices. He spearheaded initiatives like the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, a demonstration advocating for untouchables' access to public water resources. This protest underscored the legal constraints placed on lower castes and the necessity for reforms. His leadership in these efforts demonstrated his commitment to obtaining fundamental human rights through legal avenues.

Ambedkar's comprehension of the law prompted him to champion legislative reforms including women's rights and labour protections. He advocated for the Hindu Code Bill as a component of his extensive social agenda, aiming to provide rights for women concerning marriage, inheritance, and divorce. Despite encountering substantial opposition and failing to pass in its original form, the bill ultimately resulted in significant legislative reforms that modernised Hindu personal law and advanced gender equality in India (Fasana, 1976).

- **Role as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution**

Ambedkar's most notable contribution as a legal expert was his involvement in the draughting of the Indian Constitution. In 1947, he was designated as the chairman of the Draughting Committee, where

his legal acumen and dedication to social justice were important. Ambedkar diligently endeavoured to draft a constitution that was inclusive, democratic, and focused on eliminating socioeconomic disparities. His objective was to provide a legislative framework to combat the longstanding caste and social inequalities in India.

Ambedkar's contributions to the Constitution underscored fundamental rights, notably Articles 14, 15, and 17, which ensured legal equality, banned discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, and eradicated "untouchability." These laws were ground breaking, guaranteeing that no individual might face discrimination in public venues or services. The Constitution's emphasis on affirmative action—allocating reservations in education and public sector employment for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other marginalised groups was a direct result of Ambedkar's legal acumen. He recognised that mere legal equality was insufficient and advocated for structural protections to elevate socially and economically marginalised people (Dwivedi and Sinha, 2005).

- **Champion of Civil Rights and Labour Reforms**

Ambedkar's legal campaign encompassed labour rights, acknowledging the difficulties encountered by India's working classes. He advocated for labour reforms and social security initiatives to enhance circumstances for workers, many of whom originated from marginalised groups. As Minister of Law and Justice, Ambedkar played a pivotal role in the enactment of legislation safeguarding workers' rights, establishing minimum salaries, maternity benefits, and regulating work hours. His contributions established the foundation for labour legislation in independent India, guaranteeing that the law benefitted all individuals, irrespective of their social or economic standing.

He was a notable proponent of economic justice, saying that political equality must be accompanied by economic security for marginalised populations. His expertise in economics shaped his legal viewpoints on poverty and economic rights. Ambedkar aimed to guarantee that marginalised populations obtained access to resources, land, and education through his legislative reforms and policies, which were frequently denied to them by the caste system (Jadhav, 1991).

- **Advocate for Women's Rights through Legal Frameworks**

Ambedkar's dedication to female equality was evident in his roles as a lawyer and lawmaker. His support for the Hindu Code Bill was notably important, as it was one of the initial efforts in Indian legal history to confer equal rights to women within the familial framework. Despite encountering

considerable resistance from orthodox factions within society and Parliament, his initiatives ignited discussions around women's rights and resulted in reforms to Hindu personal law. Ambedkar contended that women ought to possess rights to property, adoption, and divorce, which were ground breaking concepts in the milieu of 1940s India (Sonalkar, 1999).

- **Legacy as a Legal Luminary**

Dr. Ambedkar's achievements as a legal expert have profoundly influenced Indian society. His contribution to formulating a constitution founded on the values of equality, justice, and liberty has persistently influenced India's legal and social structure. The protections and affirmative action laws included in the Constitution have been essential instruments for the empowerment of marginalised communities.

Ambedkar's legal legacy transcends his lifetime, as his concepts and reforms have significantly influenced India's dedication to human rights. His focus on equality and social justice established the basis for a progressive legal framework in post-colonial India. By confronting the social realities of caste, class, and gender inequality, Ambedkar guaranteed that the Indian Constitution would remain a dynamic text, responsive to the changing circumstances and capable of meeting the evolving demands of society (Narain, 2017).

Ambedkar as the Architect of the Indian Constitution

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's contribution as the architect of the Indian Constitution was significant and transformational. Entrusted with formulating a framework for a newly independent and varied nation, Ambedkar's leadership, legal expertise, and dedication to social justice were pivotal in crafting a Constitution that continues to underpin Indian democracy. As chairman of the Draughting Committee, Ambedkar diligently endeavoured to ensure that the constitution he produced would safeguard individual rights, secure social and economic fairness, and promote an inclusive, secular state. His vision established the groundwork for a contemporary, democratic, and equitable India, with the Constitution serving as its beacon.

- **Role as Chairman of the Drafting Committee**

In 1947, Ambedkar was designated as the chairman of the Draughting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, tasked with formulating the Indian Constitution. This nomination acknowledged his legal

expertise and steadfast dedication to social justice and equality values. The Draughting Committee, guided by Ambedkar, was assigned the responsibility of formulating a constitution that reconciled the necessity for democratic administration with India's varied social and economic conditions.

Ambedkar's methodology in formulating the Constitution was systematic and comprehensive. Utilising international examples, such as the constitutions of the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and France, he meticulously integrated ideas of democracy, federalism, individual rights, and social justice. Ambedkar recognised that India's distinctive social framework necessitated not only political liberties but also safeguards against the ingrained systems of caste and class subjugation. His leadership in the committee guaranteed that the Constitution embodied both India's democratic ambitions and its societal difficulties (Dwivedi and Sinha, 2005).

- **Vision for Social Justice and Equality**

One of Ambedkar's principal aims in formulating the Constitution was to rectify the widespread disparities inherent in India's caste structure. His personal encounters with caste discrimination fostered a lifelong dedication to combating social injustice, and he was resolute in establishing a legislative framework to safeguard marginalised populations. Ambedkar's Constitution aimed to eradicate caste-based discrimination by embedding the values of equality and justice inside its core framework.

Ambedkar played a pivotal role in formulating Articles 14, 15, and 17 of the Constitution, which ensure legal equality, ban discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, and eradicate "untouchability." Article 17 was a key element, as it directly addressed caste-based discrimination by declaring the practice of untouchability illegal. These publications were transformative, representing a significant advancement towards the creation of a society devoid of caste oppression (Jadhav, 1991).

- **Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy**

Ambedkar envisioned a Constitution that would provide political and civil rights, as well as social and economic rights. The Fundamental Rights (Articles 12-35) were formulated to safeguard individual liberties and shield citizens against capricious official actions. These rights encompass freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and safeguards against exploitation. Ambedkar sought to safeguard individuals against oppression by the state and society by ensuring these rights, so offering a legal recourse for addressing transgressions.

Alongside Fundamental Rights, Ambedkar advocated for the Directive Principles of State Policy, delineating the state's obligations in establishing a just society. These principles, while non-justiciable, delineate aspirations for social and economic advancement, obligating the state to strive for poverty eradication, inequality reduction, and equitable resource access. Ambedkar regarded these concepts as vital for attaining genuine democracy in India, contending that political democracy must be augmented by social and economic democracy. He contended that political rights alone would be insufficient for establishing an egalitarian society without rectifying economic disparities (Mishra, 1991).

- **Federalism and Administrative Framework**

Ambedkar envisioned the establishment of a balanced federal framework that would facilitate national unity while preserving local authority. The Constitution allocated authorities between the federal government and the states, specifying responsibilities to prevent conflicts and enhance governance efficiency. Ambedkar meticulously designed this federal framework to provide adaptability, especially for public order and social welfare, which were crucial for sustaining national stability and resolving local matters.

Ambedkar recognised the necessity of a robust central government in critical circumstances, which resulted in measures enabling the Union to assert authority during crises, including states of emergency. This framework aimed to promote collaboration between the central and state governments, guaranteeing that the Constitution could adjust to the varied and changing requirements of the nation (Raju, 1991).

- **Affirmative Action and Protective Discrimination**

Ambedkar recognised that legal equality alone would insufficiently elevate historically marginalised communities. He acknowledged that marginalised people, especially Dalits and Scheduled Tribes, necessitated affirmative action to attain social equality. Consequently, he implemented measures for reservation in education, employment, and legislative bodies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, guaranteeing these people access to chances for social and economic progress.

These measures, referred to as affirmative action or "protective discrimination," were revolutionary, signifying a shift from the conventional Indian social structure and facilitating the involvement of traditionally marginalised groups in the nation's progress. Ambedkar contended that in the absence of such measures, genuine equality would remain an elusive aspiration. His support for reservations was

based on his conviction that the state must address historical injustices and establish equitable conditions for all citizens (Suradkar, 2017).

- **Legacy of the Indian Constitution**

Ambedkar's contributions to the Indian Constitution significantly influenced the nation's democratic framework. The Constitution was officially ratified on November 26, 1949, and became effective on January 26, 1950, with Ambedkar's contributions constituting its moral and ethical foundation. His conception of a fair, inclusive, and democratic society was integral to every facet of the Constitution, which persists in directing India towards social justice and equality.

The Indian Constitution is among the most extensive and detailed globally, reflecting Ambedkar's dedication to tackling the intricacies of Indian society. His focus on fundamental rights, social fairness, federalism, and affirmative action has established permanent pillars of Indian democracy. Despite modifications to the Constitution, Ambedkar's fundamental concepts persist in influencing the nation's legal and political framework (Dwivedi and Sinha, 2005).

Ambedkar's Vision for Social and Economic Reforms

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision for social and economic changes was rooted in his dedication to establishing an inclusive and fair society devoid of caste discrimination and economic exploitation. Ambedkar contended that genuine democracy necessitated not merely political rights but also social and economic parity. His social reforms aimed at abolishing the caste system, especially the practice of untouchability, which he regarded as a significant obstacle to India's advancement. Ambedkar advocated for equal rights, dignity, and opportunities for marginalised people, resulting in the incorporation of Articles 14, 15, and 17 in the Indian Constitution, which ensure equality before the law, prohibit discrimination, and eradicate untouchability (Mishra, 1991).

Ambedkar championed initiatives aimed at elevating marginalised populations and establishing a more equitable economic framework. He asserted that economic autonomy and stability were essential for genuine liberty. His plans encompassed land reforms, nationalisation of essential industries, and labour rights to safeguard workers. He played a crucial role in formulating labour legislation that instituted minimum salaries, restricted working hours, and ensured social security for employees. Ambedkar's focus on economic rights underscored his conviction that political rights would be inadequate without tackling poverty and unemployment (Jadhav, 1991).

Ambedkar advocated for affirmative action by implementing reservations in education, employment, and legislatures for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to address decades of societal inequity. His vision encompassed a socially and economically transformed India, wherein individuals possessed equal access to resources, dignity, and opportunities irrespective of caste or class. Ambedkar's concepts persist in motivating endeavours to rectify social and economic disparities in contemporary India, establishing him as a central figure in the nation's quest for justice and equity.

Conclusion

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is a prominent figure in India's history, recognised as an advocate for social justice and equality. His life and endeavours were devoted to dismantling the constraints of caste prejudice and ensuring fundamental rights for the most marginalised individuals in society. As a visionary thinker, legal authority, and architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar's achievements beyond legal frameworks; he sought to transform the social and economic systems of India. He incorporated ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity in the Constitution, securing protections for marginalised people and implementing affirmative action to create equitable opportunities.

Ambedkar's vision transcended mere political democracy. He acknowledged that genuine freedom and equality could not be attained without social justice and economic empowerment. His struggle against untouchability, coupled with his promotion of labour rights, women's rights, and the rights of Dalits and Adivasis, established the foundation for an inclusive India. His efforts persist in shaping India's legal, social, and political landscape, motivating movements for human rights and social transformation.

Ambedkar's legacy embodies resilience, brilliance, and an unwavering dedication to human decency. His vision serves as a beacon for future generations, motivating an on-going quest for justice, equality, and a world devoid of oppression.

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