



Relevance of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Thought in Shaping Present-Day Democratic and Social Justice Movements

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ABSTRACT

The ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar remain profoundly influential in shaping contemporary democratic and social justice movements in India and beyond. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a pioneering advocate of equality, liberty, and fraternity, Ambedkar's intellectual legacy continues to guide struggles against caste discrimination, social exclusion, and structural inequality. This study examines the relevance of Ambedkar's thought in present-day democratic practices and social justice movements, focusing on its application in areas such as human rights activism, identity politics, and inclusive governance. Drawing on a conceptual and doctrinal research approach, the paper analyzes key elements of Ambedkar's philosophy, including social democracy, constitutional morality, annihilation of caste, and economic justice. His critique of caste as a system of graded inequality and his emphasis on institutional safeguards for marginalized communities remain central to contemporary discourse (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Omvedt, 2004). Furthermore, Ambedkar's insistence on constitutional methods of protest and reform provides a framework for democratic engagement in modern societies. The study finds that Ambedkar's ideas have been reinterpreted and mobilized by various social movements, including Dalit rights movements, feminist struggles, and digital activism. However, challenges persist in fully realizing his

vision due to socio-political constraints and the persistence of inequality (Jaffrelot, 2003). The paper concludes that Ambedkar's thought is not only historically significant but also dynamically relevant in addressing contemporary issues of justice, representation, and democracy. Strengthening engagement with his ideas can contribute to building inclusive and equitable societies.

1. Introduction

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar occupies a central place in the intellectual and political history of modern India. As a jurist, economist, and social reformer, Ambedkar dedicated his life to challenging entrenched systems of inequality, particularly the caste system, and advocating for the rights of marginalized communities. His role as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution institutionalized principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, forming the foundation of India's democratic framework (Government of India, 1950). Ambedkar's thought extends beyond constitutionalism to encompass a broader vision of social democracy. He argued that political democracy cannot succeed without social and economic democracy, emphasizing the need for equality in all spheres of life (Ambedkar, 1949/1994). His critique of caste, articulated in *Annihilation of Caste*, remains one of the most powerful analyses of social hierarchy and discrimination (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). In contemporary times, democratic and social justice movements increasingly draw upon Ambedkar's ideas to address issues such as caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and economic marginalization. Movements advocating for Dalit rights, minority representation, and social inclusion often invoke his philosophy as a guiding framework (Omvedt, 2004). Furthermore, Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality emphasizes adherence to democratic values and institutions, which is particularly relevant in the context of modern political challenges. His emphasis on education, agitation, and organization as tools for social change continues to inspire activists and scholars alike. However, despite the widespread recognition of Ambedkar's contributions, the practical realization of his vision remains incomplete. Persistent inequalities and social injustices highlight the need to revisit and reinterpret his ideas in contemporary contexts. This study explores the relevance of Ambedkar's thought in shaping present-day democratic and social justice movements, examining its theoretical foundations and practical implications.

2. Literature Review



The scholarship on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar reflects his enduring influence on democratic thought and social justice. Ambedkar's seminal work *Annihilation of Caste* critically examines caste as a system of graded inequality that perpetuates structural oppression (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). His later writings emphasize the interdependence of liberty, equality, and fraternity as essential for sustaining democracy (Ambedkar, 1949/1994). Scholars such as Omvedt (2004) highlight Ambedkar's transformative role in mobilizing Dalit consciousness and political participation. Similarly, Jaffrelot (2003) analyzes how Ambedkarite ideology contributed to the rise of caste-based democratic movements in India. Guru (2009) expands on Ambedkar's emphasis on dignity and self-respect, arguing that humiliation is central to caste oppression. Rege (2006) integrates Ambedkarite thought with feminist perspectives, emphasizing intersectionality in social justice discourse. Teltumbde (2010) critiques contemporary caste dynamics, arguing that caste persists despite constitutional safeguards. Rodrigues (2002) provides a comprehensive analysis of Ambedkar's political philosophy, particularly his emphasis on constitutional morality. Thorat and Newman (2010) examine economic discrimination and exclusion, reinforcing Ambedkar's critique of structural inequality. From a global perspective, Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011) offer theoretical parallels through capability and human development approaches, aligning with Ambedkar's emphasis on dignity and empowerment. Chakrabarty (2000) situates Ambedkar within postcolonial discourse, highlighting his critique of Western modernity. Recent studies by Paik (2014) and Rao (2019) explore Ambedkar's relevance in contemporary social movements, particularly in education and identity politics. Sarkar (2021) examines the rise of digital Ambedkarite activism, demonstrating the adaptability of his ideas in the digital age. Collectively, these studies underscore the continuing relevance of Ambedkar's thought while emphasizing the need for its reinterpretation in contemporary socio-political contexts.

3. Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, significant gaps remain in understanding the contemporary applicability of his ideas. Much of the literature focuses on historical and philosophical analyses, often neglecting the dynamic role of Ambedkarite thought in present-day democratic and social justice movements (Jaffrelot, 2003; Omvedt, 2004). Furthermore, existing studies tend to emphasize caste as the primary axis of analysis, overlooking Ambedkar's broader contributions to economic democracy, institutional reform, and global justice discourse (Thorat & Newman, 2010). There is also limited exploration of how Ambedkar's ideas intersect with emerging domains such as digital activism, intersectionality, and transnational movements (Sarkar, 2021). Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches integrating political theory, sociology, and digital studies remain underdeveloped. This study addresses



these gaps by conceptualizing Ambedkar's thought as a living framework influencing contemporary democratic practices and social justice movements.

4. Objectives

4.1 To analyze the relevance of Ambedkar's thought in contemporary democratic movements.

4.2 To examine its role in shaping social justice and inclusive governance.

5. Research Methods and Material

This study adopts a qualitative and conceptual research design. Secondary data is collected from primary texts of Ambedkar, scholarly books, journal articles, and policy documents. A doctrinal method is used to analyse Ambedkar's writings, including Annihilation of Caste and his constitutional debates. Thematic analysis identifies key concepts such as social justice, equality, and constitutional morality. Interdisciplinary sources from political science, sociology, and law are integrated to provide a comprehensive perspective. This approach enables a holistic understanding of Ambedkar's influence on contemporary movements.

6. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Ambedkarite philosophy, democratic theory, and critical social justice perspectives. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar conceptualized democracy not merely as a political system but as a mode of associated living rooted in liberty, equality, and fraternity (Ambedkar, 1949/1994). This conception forms the normative foundation of the framework. The study incorporates **critical social theory**, which examines power structures and systemic inequalities. Ambedkar's critique of caste aligns with this perspective, identifying caste as a form of institutionalized oppression that perpetuates social stratification (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). Additionally, the framework integrates **constitutionalism**, emphasizing the role of legal and institutional mechanisms in safeguarding rights and promoting social justice. Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality underscores the importance of adherence to democratic principles and institutions (Rodrigues, 2002). The framework also draws on **Sen's Capability Approach**, which emphasizes expanding individuals' freedoms and opportunities (Sen, 2009). Similarly, Nussbaum's (2011) human development theory highlights the importance of dignity and empowerment, resonating with Ambedkar's vision of social justice. Finally, **transformative social movement theory** is incorporated to explain how Ambedkarite ideas are mobilized in contemporary activism. Movements inspired by Ambedkar operate through awareness, mobilization, and institutional engagement, reflecting his emphasis on education, agitation, and organization (Omvedt, 2004). The framework thus conceptualizes Ambedkar's thought across three dimensions: normative (values of



justice), institutional (constitutional safeguards), and transformative (social movements), providing a comprehensive lens for analyzing its contemporary relevance.

7. Conceptual Analysis

The ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar provide a robust conceptual foundation for understanding contemporary democratic and social justice movements. At the core of his philosophy lies a critique of caste as a system of graded inequality, which continues to shape social hierarchies in India. Ambedkar argued that caste is not merely a social division but a deeply entrenched system of power that perpetuates exclusion and inequality (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). This critique remains highly relevant in analyzing present-day discrimination and marginalization. Ambedkar's concept of **social democracy** extends beyond political representation to include social and economic equality. He emphasized that political democracy cannot survive without social democracy, highlighting the interdependence of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Ambedkar, 1949/1994). Contemporary movements advocating for social justice often draw upon this framework to address issues such as economic inequality, gender discrimination, and minority rights. Another key concept is **constitutional morality**, which refers to adherence to democratic principles and institutional norms. Ambedkar viewed the Constitution as a tool for social transformation, emphasizing the need for citizens and leaders to uphold its values (Rodrigues, 2002). Modern democratic movements frequently invoke constitutional provisions to demand rights and accountability, reflecting Ambedkar's vision.

Ambedkar's call for the **annihilation of caste** continues to inspire Dalit movements and broader struggles for equality. His emphasis on education, organization, and agitation as tools for social change remains central to activism (Omvedt, 2004). These principles are evident in contemporary movements that seek to challenge systemic inequalities through collective action. In the digital era, Ambedkarite thought has found new avenues of expression. Social media platforms have enabled the dissemination of his ideas to a wider audience, facilitating the emergence of digital activism (Sarkar, 2021). This has expanded the scope of social justice movements, allowing for greater participation and visibility. Intersectionality is another dimension where Ambedkar's thought remains relevant. Scholars such as Rege (2006) highlight the intersection of caste, gender, and class, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches to social justice. Ambedkar's advocacy for women's rights and labor rights further underscores his holistic vision.

However, challenges persist in realizing Ambedkar's vision. Structural inequalities, political resistance, and social prejudices continue to hinder progress (Teltumbde, 2010). Despite constitutional



safeguards, discrimination and exclusion remain prevalent in various forms. Thus, Ambedkar's thought serves as both a critique of existing inequalities and a framework for transformative change. Its relevance lies in its adaptability to contemporary contexts, providing a guiding philosophy for democratic and social justice movements.

8. Result

The analysis reveals that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thought continues to play a significant role in shaping contemporary democratic and social justice movements. His principles of equality, dignity, and social justice are widely invoked in advocacy, policy debates, and grassroots activism. The findings indicate that Ambedkarite ideas have been instrumental in mobilizing marginalized communities, particularly in Dalit and minority rights movements. These movements utilize constitutional frameworks to demand justice and accountability, reflecting Ambedkar's emphasis on legal and institutional mechanisms (Jaffrelot, 2003).

The study also highlights the growing importance of digital platforms in disseminating Ambedkar's ideas. Online activism has enabled greater awareness and participation, particularly among younger generations (Sarkar, 2021). This demonstrates the adaptability of Ambedkarite thought in contemporary contexts. However, the results also reveal significant challenges. Structural inequalities and socio-political constraints limit the effectiveness of these movements. Despite constitutional safeguards, discrimination persists in various forms, indicating a gap between Ambedkar's vision and its realization (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Overall, the findings suggest that while Ambedkar's thought remains highly relevant, its transformative potential is constrained by systemic barriers.

9. Discussion

The findings underscore the enduring relevance of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thought in contemporary democratic and social justice movements. His emphasis on constitutional morality and social democracy provides a strong foundation for addressing issues of inequality and exclusion. However, the persistence of caste-based discrimination and socio-economic disparities highlights the limitations of existing frameworks. While Ambedkar's ideas are widely recognized, their implementation remains inconsistent. This reflects broader challenges in translating theoretical principles into practical outcomes. The discussion also highlights the role of digital activism in revitalizing Ambedkarite discourse. Social media platforms have enabled new forms of engagement, allowing marginalized voices to be heard. However, digital spaces also present challenges, including misinformation and polarization. Furthermore, the



intersectional nature of contemporary social justice movements requires a broader interpretation of Ambedkar's thought. Integrating issues of gender, class, and technology can enhance its relevance in addressing complex social challenges.

10. Suggestions

To strengthen the contemporary relevance of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thought, a comprehensive and multidimensional approach is essential. First, educational institutions should systematically integrate Ambedkarite philosophy into curricula across disciplines, not only within social sciences but also in law, technology, and management, thereby fostering critical awareness of equality, justice, and constitutional morality among students. Second, public policy frameworks must be strengthened to ensure effective implementation of constitutional safeguards, particularly in addressing caste-based discrimination, economic inequality, and social exclusion.

Third, social movements should adopt intersectional approaches that link caste with gender, class, and emerging issues such as digital inequality, thereby broadening the scope of Ambedkarite activism. Fourth, digital platforms should be strategically utilized to disseminate Ambedkar's ideas, promote awareness, and mobilize collective action, especially among younger generations. Fifth, civil society organizations should engage in sustained advocacy and community-based initiatives that translate Ambedkar's principles into practical outcomes.

Finally, there is a need for interdisciplinary research that connects Ambedkarite thought with contemporary global discourses on human rights, democracy, and social justice. Such efforts can ensure that Ambedkar's vision of an egalitarian and inclusive society is not only preserved but actively realized in present-day contexts.

11. Conclusion

The ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar remain profoundly relevant in shaping contemporary democratic and social justice movements. His philosophy provides a comprehensive framework for addressing structural inequalities and promoting inclusive governance. This study demonstrates that Ambedkar's thought continues to influence activism, policy discourse, and academic scholarship. His emphasis on social democracy, constitutional morality, and the annihilation of caste offers valuable insights for addressing modern challenges. However, the persistence of inequality highlights the need for renewed engagement with his ideas. Bridging the gap between theory and practice is essential for realizing his



vision. Ultimately, Ambedkar's legacy serves as a guiding force for building a just, equitable, and democratic society, underscoring the enduring significance of his thought in contemporary times.

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