

## **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Social Justice**

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### **Abstract**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, was a visionary reformer and relentless advocate for social justice. Born into a Dalit community, Ambedkar's personal experiences with caste discrimination shaped his lifelong mission to dismantle social hierarchies and promote equality. Through his academic excellence, legal expertise, and political activism, he championed the rights of the marginalized, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. His concept of social justice extended beyond legal equality to encompass economic empowerment, gender justice, and the annihilation of caste. As a constitutionalist, he ensured that democratic principles and human rights were embedded in the Indian legal framework. His conversion to Buddhism represented a spiritual and social revolution, providing dignity and identity to millions. This study examines Ambedkar's life, ideology, and lasting impact on India's pursuit of an inclusive and equitable society.

### **Key Words**

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar , Social Justice , Caste System, Indian Constitution, Dalit Rights, Reservation Policy, Gender Equality, Buddhism, Untouchability, Equality and Liberty

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### **Introduction**

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was a visionary leader, jurist, economist, and social reformer who championed the cause of the oppressed and marginalized communities in India. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and the foremost advocate of social justice, Ambedkar's contributions laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable Indian society. His philosophy, activism, and writings remain crucial in understanding and addressing issues related to caste discrimination, untouchability, economic inequality, and human rights.

This study explores Dr. Ambedkar's concept of social justice, his life and struggles, Dalit movement, his efforts in framing the Indian Constitution, and his enduring legacy in Indian social and political thought.

## I. Early Life and Experiences of Discrimination

Dr. Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow, in the present state of Madhya Pradesh, in a Mahar family — a Dalit caste considered “untouchable” by the dominant Hindu orthodoxy. Although his father was a Subedar in the British Army, Ambedkar's early life was filled with humiliating experiences of caste-based discrimination.

Despite being a brilliant student, he was segregated in school — denied water, made to sit outside the classroom, and treated as inferior. These early injustices profoundly influenced Ambedkar's resolve to fight the caste system and secure equal rights for the oppressed.

## II. Education and Intellectual Development

Ambedkar's pursuit of education was relentless and ground breaking. He earned multiple degrees, including:

- **B.A.** from Elphinstone College, Bombay University
- **M.A. and Ph.D.** from Columbia University, USA
- **D.Sc.** from the London School of Economics
- **Bar-at-Law** from Gray's Inn, London

This extensive education exposed him to Western liberal, socialist, and democratic philosophies. Thinkers like John Dewey, Karl Marx, and the Enlightenment philosophers deeply influenced his vision of social justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

## III. Understanding Ambedkar's Idea of Social Justice

For Ambedkar, **social justice** was inseparable from **equality, dignity, and freedom**. Unlike mere political justice or economic reform, his concept of social justice involved dismantling the **caste hierarchy** that denied equal status to millions.

He believed:

- No society can claim to be just if it is based on graded inequality.
- Caste is a form of social tyranny.
- Without annihilation of caste, India could never be a true democracy.

### Ambedkar's Social Justice Pillars:

1. **Annihilation of Caste**
2. **Upliftment of the Depressed Classes (Dalits)**
3. **Legal and Constitutional Safeguards**
4. **Economic Empowerment and Education**
5. **Gender Equality**
6. **Religious Freedom**

Ambedkar's most famous and radical contribution to the discourse on social justice is his 1936 speech "*Annihilation of Caste*", which was never delivered due to its rejection by the organizers. In it, Ambedkar criticized not just caste practice, but also the Hindu scriptures and societal values that perpetuated it.

He argued:

- The **caste** system is not merely a division of labour, but a division of labourers.
- The **varna** system legitimizes inequality and is incompatible with modern democracy.
- True reform requires the **complete destruction of Brahmanical authority** and scriptures that uphold caste.

He urged Dalits to **educate, agitate, and organize** against their oppression.

### IV. Political Activism and Dalit Mobilization

Ambedkar's political activism was focused on securing rights for the **Depressed Classes**. Some key milestones include:

### 1. Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (1924)

He founded this organization to promote education, socio-political awareness, and welfare of the outcastes.

### 2. Mahad Satyagraha (1927)

He led Dalits in a protest to drink water from a public tank, asserting their right to common civil amenities. It was a historic challenge to caste exclusion.

### 3. Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha (1930)

He organized protests demanding the right of Dalits to enter Hindu temples — another bold assertion of social justice.

### 4. Poona Pact (1932)

Initially, Ambedkar demanded **separate electorates** for Dalits to ensure political representation. Gandhi opposed this. The Poona Pact was a compromise where Dalits got **reserved seats** in legislatures but within the general electorate.

Though controversial, this ensured some level of political empowerment for Dalits and led to the **introduction of political reservations** in India.

## V. Role in Drafting the Indian Constitution

As the **Chairman of the Drafting Committee** of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar embedded principles of **social justice** into the core structure of independent India.

### Key Constitutional Provisions:

1. **Article 15** – Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
2. **Article 17** – Abolishes untouchability.
3. **Article 46** – Promotes educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Tribes.
4. **Reservations** – Legislative, educational, and employment-based affirmative action for SC/STs and later extended to OBCs.

5. **Fundamental Rights & Directive Principles** – To ensure liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Ambedkar envisioned the Constitution as a tool for **revolutionary social transformation**, aiming to eliminate caste and foster inclusive democracy.

## **VI. Economic Justice and Development**

Dr. Ambedkar was a trained economist and a powerful advocate for **economic democracy**.

- He opposed **capitalist exploitation** and favored **state socialism**.
- He emphasized **land reforms, industrialization, and employment schemes** for marginalized groups.
- He supported **labor rights, minimum wages, and equal work opportunities**.
- He was instrumental in the formation of the **Finance Commission** and **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.

His vision of social justice always included **economic empowerment** of the poor and downtrodden.

## **VII. Women and Social Justice**

Ambedkar was also a strong advocate for **women's rights**.

- As the **first Law Minister** of India, he drafted the **Hindu Code Bill**, aiming to give women equal rights in marriage, inheritance, and divorce.
- Though the Bill faced resistance and was diluted, it laid the foundation for later reforms in gender justice.
- He recognized **intersectionality** — the way caste and gender oppression overlapped, especially for Dalit women.

He believed that **no society can be just if its women are not treated equally**.

## **VIII. Conversion to Buddhism: Spiritual Liberation as Social Justice**

In 1956, Dr. Ambedkar, along with over 5 lakh followers, embraced **Buddhism**, renouncing Hinduism, which he saw as inherently oppressive.

## Why Buddhism?

- It was **egalitarian**, non-Brahminical, and opposed to caste.
- It emphasized **compassion, morality, and rationality**.
- It offered a **dignified identity** to Dalits.

This **mass conversion** was both a spiritual and political act — a **revolutionary move toward self-respect and social emancipation**.

## IX. Legacy and Continuing Relevance

Ambedkar's ideas continue to resonate in modern India and beyond.

### 1. Dalit Movements and Ambedkarite Politics

Many political and social movements in India — like the **Dalit Panthers**, **Bahujan Samaj Party**, and various student organizations — draw inspiration from Ambedkar's teachings.

### 2. Global Recognition

Dr. Ambedkar has received posthumous global recognition:

- Time Magazine listed him among the “Greatest Leaders of All Time.”
- Statues of Ambedkar stand in the UK, USA, and other countries.

### 3. Social Justice Policies

Reservation policies, legal protections against caste atrocities (e.g., **SC/ST Atrocities Act**), and continued debates on equality reflect his impact.

### 4. Academia and Intellectual Legacy

Ambedkar Studies is now a growing interdisciplinary field, with scholars examining his contributions to law, economics, feminism, and human rights.

## X. Challenges in Realizing Ambedkar's Vision

Despite legal safeguards, **caste discrimination remains entrenched** in many parts of India.

- Dalits still face **violence, segregation, and economic exclusion**.
- Caste-based atrocities and honor killings are reported regularly.
- The **privileged castes** continue to dominate institutions.

Thus, **Ambedkar's struggle is unfinished**. Social justice must remain a living, evolving project.

## Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life and work represent an extraordinary struggle for **social justice, human dignity, and democratic ideals**. His philosophy transcended caste; it was about creating a **just, equitable, and compassionate society**. His enduring relevance lies in his unwavering belief in **constitutional methods, rationality, and human rights**.

In a world still plagued by inequality, discrimination, and injustice, Ambedkar's legacy serves as a moral compass — urging us to continue the unfinished journey toward **true social justice**.

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