

**The Reclaiming Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Legacy:
Contemporary Relevance and Challenges**
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15504850>

ABSTRACT:

This article revisits the legacy of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, a pivotal figure in Indian history, and explores its contemporary relevance and challenges. As a champion of social justice, Ambedkar's ideas on caste annihilation, gender equality, and economic empowerment continue to resonate with marginalized communities in India. However, his legacy has also been subject to co-option, appropriation, and contestation by various groups, including the state, political parties, and dominant castes. This article critically examines the ways in which Ambedkar's legacy has been reclaimed and reinterpreted by different stakeholders, including Dalit activists, feminist scholars, and progressive intellectuals. It argues that Ambedkar's ideas remain relevant today, particularly in the context of rising inequality, caste violence, and patriarchal oppression. However, the article also highlights the challenges of reclaiming Ambedkar's legacy in a context where his ideas are often diluted, distorted, or co-opted by dominant groups. It suggests that a critical and nuanced understanding of Ambedkar's thought is necessary to reclaim his legacy and to harness its transformative potential for social justice and human emancipation.

KEYWORDS:

B.R. Ambedkar, legacy, social justice, caste, gender, inequality, contemporary relevance, challenges.

Introduction:

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely.”

–Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, affectionately known as Babasaheb, was a visionary leader, a fierce critic of social injustice, and a champion of human rights. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar played a pivotal role in shaping the country’s democratic framework. His life’s work was dedicated to the emancipation of marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits, who had been subjected to centuries of oppression and exclusion. Seventy-five years after India’s independence, Ambedkar’s legacy continues to inspire and influence social movements, intellectual debates, and policy discussions. His ideas on social justice, equality, and human rights remain remarkably relevant in contemporary India, where the persistence of caste-based discrimination, growing economic inequality, and rising social intolerance pose significant challenges to the country’s democratic fabric. Despite the profound impact of Ambedkar’s work, his legacy has been subject to various forms of co-option, appropriation, and contestation. Dominant castes, political parties, and state institutions have often sought to dilute or distort Ambedkar’s ideas to suit their own interests. Meanwhile, marginalized communities and social movements have continued to draw inspiration from Ambedkar’s vision, using it to inform their struggles for justice, equality, and human rights. This article seeks to reclaim Ambedkar’s legacy from the multiple forms of appropriation and distortion that have sought to undermine its radical potential. By examining the contemporary relevance and challenges of Ambedkar’s ideas, this article aims to demonstrate the enduring significance of his work and its continued importance for social justice and human emancipation in India today.

Aim and objectives of the study:

1. To delve into Ambedkar's thoughts on social justice, equality, and democracy, and understand how they remain relevant in addressing contemporary social issues.
2. To analyze how Ambedkar's ideas can be applied to current social and economic problems, such as caste-based discrimination, inequality, and social injustice.
3. To discuss the challenges faced by Ambedkar's legacy, including attempts to co-opt or distort his ideas by various groups, and the need to reclaim his legacy in its true form.
4. To highlight the importance of Ambedkar's ideas in promoting social justice and equality, and inspiring future generations to continue his work.
5. To encourage critical thinking and debate on Ambedkar's ideas and their relevance in contemporary society, and to promote a nuanced understanding of his legacy.

Research Methodology:

1. **Qualitative Research:** The article will employ a qualitative research approach, focusing on in-depth analysis and interpretation of Ambedkar's ideas, their contemporary relevance, and the challenges faced by his legacy.
2. **Critical Discourse Analysis:** The article will use critical discourse analysis to examine the language, tone, and narrative used by various stakeholders to interpret and reinterpret Ambedkar's legacy.

Data Collection Methods:

1. **Primary Sources:** the article will draw on primary sources, including Ambedkar's writings, speeches, and interviews.

2. **Secondary Sources:** The article will also rely on secondary sources, such as academic articles, books, and research papers on Ambedkar's life, work, and legacy.
3. **Expert Interviews:** the article may include expert interviews with scholars, activists, and thinkers who have worked on Ambedkar's ideas and legacy.

Research Questions:

1. How can Ambedkar's Legacy on social justice, equality, and democracy be reclaimed and reinterpreted in contemporary India?
2. What are the key challenges faced by Ambedkar's legacy in contemporary India, and how can they be addressed?
3. How can Ambedkar's legacy be used to promote social justice, equality, and human rights in contemporary India?

1. Ambedkar's legacy on social justice, equality, and democracy be reclaimed and reinterpreted in contemporary India:

“Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion, of compensation. In short, justice is another name of liberty, equality, and fraternity.”– **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy on social justice, equality, and democracy remains a critical force in contemporary India. His work as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution laid the foundation for a society striving toward inclusivity and empowerment of marginalized communities. Over the years, his contributions have been reclaimed and reinterpreted in various ways to address modern socio-political realities. 1. Social Justice and Dalit Empowerment: Ambedkar's lifelong struggle against caste discrimination continues to inspire movements advocating for Dalit rights and social justice. His emphasis on education as a means of emancipation has been

reclaimed through increasing access to higher education, affirmative action policies, and grassroots activism. Contemporary Dalit movements, such as the Bhim Army and Ambedkarite student groups, invoke his vision to challenge systemic discrimination.2. Affirmative Action and Reservation Policies: Ambedkar's advocacy for reservations in education and employment has been expanded over the years to address inequalities. Today, debates over affirmative action, including the extension of reservations to economically weaker sections (EWS) and private sector jobs, reflect a reinterpretation of his principles in the evolving socio-economic landscape.

1. Democracy and Constitutional Morality: "If I find the Constitution being misused, I shall be the first to burn it." Ambedkar's warning against social tyranny undermining democracy is particularly relevant in contemporary India. His idea of constitutional morality, emphasizing adherence to democratic values over majoritarianism, is frequently cited in legal and political debates, especially concerning issues of dissent, freedom of speech, and secularism. The judiciary and civil society organizations often refer to his works to safeguard democratic principles.

2. Women's Rights and Gender Justice: "Women should be treated as human beings first and foremost. A society that does not respect its women cannot be called a civilized society." Ambedkar was a staunch advocate of gender equality, reflected in his contributions to the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to provide women with equal rights in marriage, inheritance, and property. Feminist movements today reclaim his legacy in their struggles for legal reforms on marriage, sexual violence, and workplace discrimination. His emphasis on dignity for all resonates in debates on LGBTQ+ rights as well.

2. The key challenges faced by Ambedkar's legacy in contemporary India:

The key challenges faced by Ambedkar's legacy in contemporary India are multifaceted. One major challenge is the persistent caste-based discrimination, which Ambedkar fought tirelessly against. Despite the constitutional safeguards he put in place, caste discrimination remains a harsh reality for many Indians. Another challenge is the co-option and distortion of Ambedkar's ideas by various groups, including political parties and conservative forces. This has led to a watering down of his radical vision for social justice and equality. Furthermore, social and economic inequalities continue to plague Indian society, with marginalized communities facing significant barriers to education, employment, and healthcare. Ambedkar's emphasis on education as a tool for social empowerment remains relevant, but its implementation remains a challenge. Additionally, political pressures and resistance to social reform continue to hinder the full realization of Ambedkar's vision. Conservative forces often push back against efforts to implement policies aimed at promoting social justice and equality. Lastly, the need for ongoing critical engagement and reinterpretation of Ambedkar's ideas in the context of contemporary India is essential.

3. The role of Ambedkar's legacy to promote social justice, equality, and human rights in contemporary India:

“Political power should be used for the protection of the oppressed, and not to serve the interests of a few.” Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of an egalitarian society remains highly relevant in contemporary India. His emphasis on social justice, constitutional morality, and democratic values provides a framework to address caste discrimination, economic inequality, and human rights violations.

Strengthening Affirmative Action and Social Welfare Policies:

Ambedkar's advocacy for reservation policies to uplift Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) must be reinforced to ensure access to education, employment, and political representation.

- Expanding affirmative action to private sector jobs, entrepreneurship, and higher education institutions can provide economic and social mobility for marginalized communities.
- Strengthening social welfare programs, including land redistribution, financial inclusion, and housing schemes, would help reduce economic inequality.

2. Ensuring Legal Protections and Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Laws:

Effective implementation of laws such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act can protect Dalits and Adivasis from violence and discrimination.

- Legal frameworks must be expanded to criminalize caste-based discrimination in workplaces, housing, and social institutions.
- Fast-track courts for caste and gender-based violence can ensure timely justice for victims.

3. Promoting Constitutional Morality and Democratic Values:

- Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality—which emphasizes the supremacy of the Constitution over religious, caste-based, and majoritarian influences—should guide policymaking and governance.
- Strengthening democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, Election Commission, and free press, can safeguard human rights and prevent authoritarian tendencies.

- Defending freedom of speech and the right to dissent aligns with Ambedkar's belief in a vibrant, participatory democracy.

4. Advancing Dalit and Marginalized Political Representation:

- Encouraging independent political mobilization among Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups can strengthen social justice movements.
- Supporting the rise of new political leaders who uphold Ambedkarite principles can prevent the dilution of his vision by mainstream political parties.
- Electoral reforms to increase marginalized community participation in governance can help achieve greater equity in policy-making.

6. Strengthening Education and Awareness on Ambedkarite Thought:

- Introducing Ambedkar's writings on caste, democracy, and human rights in school and university curricula can foster a generation that values equality and social justice.
- Establishing research centers and fellowships on Ambedkarite studies can deepen intellectual engagement with his ideas.
- Public awareness campaigns, social media advocacy, and documentaries can help reclaim and spread Ambedkar's message in the digital age.

Conclusion:

“Ambedkar's legacy is not just a reminder of the past; it is a call to action for the present and the future. It is a reminder that the struggle for social justice is ongoing and that we must continue to fight for a just and equal society.” – Arundhati Roy.

In conclusion, reclaiming Ambedkar's legacy is a crucial task for contemporary India. As we navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world, Ambedkar's ideas on social justice, equality, and democracy offer a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the challenges we face. Through his tireless advocacy for the rights of marginalized communities, Ambedkar showed us that a more just and equal society is possible. His legacy reminds us that the struggle for social justice is ongoing, and that we must continue to challenge dominant ideologies and power structures in order to create a more equitable world. As we reclaim Ambedkar's legacy, we must also acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead. We must confront the ways in which Ambedkar's ideas have been co-opted, distorted, and erased, and we must work to reclaim his legacy in its true form. Ultimately, reclaiming Ambedkar's legacy is not just about honoring his memory; it is about harnessing the power of his ideas to create a more just and equitable society for all. As we move forward, let us draw inspiration from Ambedkar's courage, conviction, and commitment to social justice, and let us work together to build a brighter future for generations to come.

Recommendations:

Critical Education: Incorporate Ambedkar's ideas and legacy into educational curricula to promote critical thinking and social awareness.

Policy Reforms: Advocate for policy reforms that address the ongoing struggles of marginalized communities, including caste-based discrimination, economic inequality, and social injustice.

Social Movements: Support and amplify social movements that draw inspiration from Ambedkar's legacy, including movements for Dalit rights, women's empowerment, and environmental justice.

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Funding:

This study was not funded by any grant.

Conflict of interest:

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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