
**The Representation and Reservation:
Ambedkar's Political Legacy in Modern India
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ABSTRACT:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political philosophy remains a cornerstone of India's democratic structure, particularly in the domains of representation, reservation, and social justice. His vision for equality was not limited to constitutional ideals but extended into institutional mechanisms that ensured the participation of historically marginalized groups in political, educational, and economic spheres. Through the principles of protective discrimination and political representation, Ambedkar sought to transform a hierarchical society into one based on dignity, opportunity, and fraternity. This paper critically examines Ambedkar's conception of representation as a tool for empowerment, analyzing how he differentiated between political and social representation. The introduction of reservation policies in legislatures, services, and education was not merely an act of redress but a radical democratization of the Indian polity. These provisions were envisioned as transitional measures to enable social mobility and moral equality, rather than permanent privileges. In the contemporary era, Ambedkar's legacy continues to animate debates on affirmative action, identity politics, and social inclusion. It argues that the enduring relevance of Ambedkar's legacy lies not merely in the mechanics of reservation but in the ethical and humanistic foundation of his thought – a vision that compels India to pursue substantive, not just formal, equality.

KEYWORDS:

Social Justice, Political Representation, Reservation Policy, Democratic Equality, Ambedkarite Legacy.

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Introduction:

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar stands as one of the most profound architects of modern India's democratic ethos. His intellectual and political legacy transcends the confines of caste discourse, reaching into the very foundations of representation, citizenship, and social justice. Ambedkar's insistence that democracy must be both political and social introduced a transformative vision in which the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were not abstract ideals but instruments for the reconstruction of an unequal society. His theory of representation and reservation evolved as a pragmatic and moral framework to translate the promise of democracy into a lived reality for the historically marginalized. Ambedkar perceived caste not merely as a social hierarchy but as a system of graded inequality that denied the majority of Indians access to power, dignity, and opportunity. Thus, his advocacy for reservations in legislatures, public employment, and education was not an act of charity but an essential corrective to centuries of social exclusion. For Ambedkar, representation was empowerment a means by which the oppressed could articulate their collective voice within the structures of governance and influence the processes of nation-building.

In contemporary India, Ambedkar's framework remains deeply relevant. The challenge before Indian democracy today lies in realizing Ambedkar's ideal of "an associated mode of living" a society where representation transcends identity politics to embody genuine participation and shared dignity. It reaffirms Ambedkar's enduring message: that democracy is not merely a form of government but a way of life founded on mutual respect, moral equality, and social solidarity.

Aim and objectives of the study:

1. To critically examine Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's conception of representation and reservation as instruments of social justice and democratic empowerment.
2. To evaluate the contemporary relevance and effectiveness of Ambedkar's legacy in shaping India's policies of affirmative action and inclusive governance.

Research Methodology: The present study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology to examine Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political philosophy and its enduring influence on India's policies of rep-

resentation and reservation. It combines historical, descriptive, and interpretative approaches to explore both the theoretical underpinnings and contemporary implications of Ambedkar's thought.

Data Collection Methods: The research relies primarily on secondary data. Key sources include: Primary writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, such as *Annihilation of Caste*, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, and his speeches in the Constituent Assembly. Government documents and constitutional debates, Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journals, research articles, and policy reports focusing on Ambedkar's political thought and its contemporary application. Historical records and sociological analyses of Dalit movements and post-independence reservation policies.

Research Questions:

1. How did Dr. B.R. Ambedkar conceptualize representation and reservation as mechanisms for achieving social justice, equality, and democratic inclusion within the Indian constitutional framework?
2. To what extent has Ambedkar's vision of representation and reservation been realized or transformed in contemporary India's political and socio-economic context?

Discussion:

1. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar conceptualize representation and reservation as mechanisms for achieving social justice, equality, and democratic inclusion within the Indian constitutional framework: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's political philosophy was rooted in the belief that democracy must go beyond political form to become a social reality. For him, the essence of democracy was not merely the rule of the majority but the recognition of equality and the assurance of participation for all sections of society, particularly those historically excluded by caste-based hierarchies. Within this moral and political vision, Ambedkar conceptualized representation and reservation as essential mechanisms to realize social justice, equality, and democratic inclusion.

a. Representation as the Foundation of Equality: Ambedkar viewed representation as the cornerstone of true democracy. In his understanding, a political system cannot be democratic unless all communities, especially the marginalized, are able to participate effectively in decision-making. He argued that formal political rights, such as universal

adult franchise, would remain hollow without substantive representation, the actual presence and voice of disadvantaged groups in legislative and administrative bodies. For Ambedkar, representation was not about numerical inclusion alone; it was about moral and social recognition. He believed that without guaranteed representation, oppressed communities like the Dalits would continue to be politically invisible, perpetuating their exclusion from governance and policy-making processes.

b. Reservation as an Instrument of Social Justice: Ambedkar's advocacy of reservation emerged from his conviction that centuries of discrimination could not be undone by formal equality alone. Social justice required positive state intervention to level the field. He introduced reservation in legislatures, education, and public employment as a temporary but necessary mechanism to redress historical injustices and create conditions for real equality of opportunity. The constitutional provisions under Articles 15(4), 16(4), 330, and 332 reflect Ambedkar's vision, where affirmative action becomes an ethical and political tool to integrate marginalized communities into the mainstream of national life.

c. Democratic Inclusion and Moral Reconstruction: Ambedkar's approach extended beyond institutional reforms to the moral reconstruction of Indian society. He maintained that social democracy, the realization of equality, liberty, and fraternity in everyday life must precede political democracy. Representation and reservation were, therefore, means to an end: the creation of a society free from graded inequality. He warned that democracy in India could not survive without addressing the structural barriers of caste and exclusion. For Ambedkar, the success of the Constitution depended on the moral transformation of the people and the acceptance of social equality as a shared national value.

d. Constitutional Realization: Ambedkar's influence as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee ensured that his ideas were institutionalized in the Indian Constitution. He designed a constitutional framework that combined political democracy with social democracy, ensuring that the oppressed could access representation, dignity, and self-respect through legitimate state mechanisms. In essence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's conceptualization of representation and reservation was not a policy of division but a project of integration, a transformative vision aimed at converting India's formal democracy into a substantive, participatory, and egalitarian order.

2. Ambedkar's vision of representation and reservation transformed in contemporary India's political and socio-economic context: Dr.B.R. Ambedkar envisioned representation and reservation as twin instruments to achieve social justice, equality, and democratic inclusion for historically marginalized communities. In his constitutional philosophy, these measures were not mere welfare provisions but structural correctives against entrenched social hierarchies.

a. Ambedkar's Original Vision: Representation as Political Justice, He emphasized effective participation of the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and minorities in political decision-making. Reservation as Social Reform, for him, reservation in education and employment was a temporary but necessary measure to dismantle caste-based exclusion and enable equal opportunity. Constitutional Embedding, Articles 330–342 ensured reserved seats, while Article 16(4) and Article 335 provided for employment reservation.

b. Transformation in the Political Context: Expansion Beyond SC/ST, The Mandal Commission (1990) extended reservations to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), widening Ambedkar's framework from caste abolition to broader social equity. Rise of Caste-Based Politics, Political mobilization around reservation has led to vote-bank politics and competitive populism. Example: Regional parties (e.g., BSP, RJD, DMK) using caste identity as a mobilizing tool. Ambedkar's rational, emancipatory politics is often replaced by symbolic representation or political tokenism. Judicial Reinterpretations, The Supreme Court's rulings in cases like Indra Sawhney (1992) and Janhit Abhiyan (2022) (regarding EWS reservation) reflect a shift from Ambedkar's social justice focus to economic criteria and merit-based balancing.

c. Transformation in the Socio-Economic Context: Shift from Social to Economic Backwardness, Recent inclusion of Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among upper castes shows a conceptual departure from Ambedkar's caste-centric social justice. Urbanization and New Inequalities, Education and private-sector employment have created new hierarchies where traditional reservations offer limited upliftment due to privatization and skill gaps. Intra-Group Disparities, Within SC/ST/OBC categories, dominant sub-castes benefit disproportionately, raising debates about sub-categorization– a concern Ambedkar foresaw when he spoke of the need for adequate representation of all segments. Emergence of a

Dalit Middle Class, Reservation policies have produced a segment that participates in democratic and economic life, yet faces subtle exclusion—what sociologists’ term new forms of caste modernity.

d. Contemporary Challenges to Ambedkar’s Vision: Depoliticization of Representation, Dalit and minority leaders are often co-opted by mainstream parties, weakening autonomous political articulation. Erosion of Constitutional Morality, Ambedkar’s insistence on constitutional morality over popular morality is frequently undermined by identity-based populism and majoritarian narratives. Privatization and Market Economy, Declining state-sector jobs have made reservations less impactful, requiring new mechanisms for affirmative action in private employment. Digital Divide and New Exclusions, Technological advancement has created a fresh socio-economic gap, demanding a reimagining of Ambedkar’s justice framework for the digital era.

e. Relevance of Ambedkar’s Vision Today: Democratizing Democracy, His insistence on moral and institutional safeguards remains vital to prevent democracy from degenerating into tyranny of the majority, Need for Inclusive Development Policies must evolve from quota-based justice to capability-based empowerment, through education, entrepreneurship, and access to technology. and Reinventing Representation, True representation today must include voice in policymaking, digital participation, and gendered social inclusion.

Conclusion:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision of representation and reservation was grounded in a profound moral and constitutional philosophy—one that sought not merely the redistribution of opportunities but the reconstruction of Indian society on the foundations of justice, equality, and fraternity. His conception of democracy was not limited to electoral participation; it was a moral project that demanded the annihilation of caste and the inclusion of historically excluded communities in every sphere of national life. Ambedkar’s vision was never static; it was a living philosophy and dynamic blueprint for social transformation. In contemporary India, to honor it truly is to go beyond quotas and seats, and to build a society where no individual’s worth is determined by birth, but by the full flowering of their human potential.

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