

Dalit Emancipation for Social Justice through Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision M.H. Hullur

Teaching Faculty, Dept and Research Centre for Women's Studies,
Karnatak University, Dharwad.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17804251>

ABSTRACT:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, also known as Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, was a multifaceted figure revered as a messiah of the Dalit community. He embodied roles as an intellectual, revolutionary, philosopher, patriot, scholar, writer, and the principal architect of the Constitution of India. Throughout his life, he fiercely opposed untouchability and the caste system, drawing from his own experiences as an untouchable and extending his mission to include other marginalized classes. Ambedkar advocated for the emancipation of Dalits and marginalized groups through a three-pronged approach centered on education, agitation, and organization. His vision for social justice was deeply intertwined with notions of a virtuous society, rationality, and a scientific worldview. Ambedkar espoused the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all human beings, envisioning a social system founded on harmonious relations among individuals across all spheres of life. Consequently, Ambedkarite socialism holds significant relevance for Indian society, offering a pathway towards achieving social justice, eradicating untouchability, and realizing true equality and democracy.

KEYWORDS:

Social Justice, Democracy, Social order, Caste structure.

.....

Introduction

Caste serves as a microcosm of Indian society, obscuring the humanity of millions for centuries. Rooted in Brahminical ideals of purity and pollution, it has perpetuated a system of oppression and discrimination. However, throughout history, dynamic leaders have emerged to challenge this entrenched hierarchy. Figures such as EV Ram Swami Naicker, Jyotibha Phule, Guruchand Thakur, Sri Narayana Guru, and Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj spearheaded movements against the tyranny of caste, shaking the very foundations of traditional Hindu culture. Among them, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a visionary reformer from the Mahar community an untouchable caste led one of the most relentless and

successful campaigns against caste-based oppression. This essay delves into Ambedkar's vision for social justice and equality, skilfully navigating the terrain of Brahminical orthodoxy within Hinduism. Examining his principles from a contemporary perspective, this article underscores the significance of his methods of agitation and his commitment to constitutionalism in advancing Dalit emancipation and broader human liberation.

Objective of the study:

- To understand the Dalit Emancipation through Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision of Social Justice

Hindu social order and the malady of Caste structure:

Dr. Ambedkar staunchly criticized the Brahminic social order prevalent in Hindu society, highlighting its inherent flaws and injustices. Within this framework, the Hindu social order recognized only four classes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, with Brahmins holding the supreme position according to the Manu Smriti. Ambedkar argued that this social hierarchy lacked consideration for individual merit and justice, perpetuating inequality and denying opportunities to the lower castes, particularly the Shudras. In his essay titled 'The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles', Dr. Ambedkar condemned the Manu Smriti for supporting social inequality and endorsing a caste system characterized by endogamy, wherein individuals were bound by birth to a specific caste. Having experienced firsthand the humiliation and exploitation inflicted by the upper castes, Ambedkar dedicated himself to organizing a social revolution aimed at establishing justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and human dignity. He drew inspiration from the teachings and actions of figures such as Gautam Buddha, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mahatma Jyotibaro Phule, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Tukaram, Rabi Das, and Chokhamela, who advocated tirelessly for social equality. Dr. Ambedkar pinpointed the root cause of social injustice against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as the caste system inherent in Hindu society, which he traced back to religion, specifically Brahminism, and ultimately to political power. He decried the lack of independent public opinion and impartial administrative machinery to address and curb caste-based discrimination. Economic disparities further exacerbated social inequality, with a few individuals amassing immense wealth while

many others endured lives of misery and deprivation.

Regarding the plight of women, Dr. Ambedkar criticized Hindu Shastras for relegating women to the status of bond slaves, subjected to subjugation and exploitation throughout their lives. He denounced the denial of education to women under the Manu-centric social order, which he viewed as both an insult and injury to women in India, perpetuating their marginalization and oppression.

Perception of Social Justice by Dr B R Ambedkar

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's perception of social justice resonates with the idea proposed by Bergson, emphasizing equality, proportionality, and compensation. His concept of justice is deeply rooted in human values, particularly liberty, equality, and fraternity for all individuals. While Dr. Ambedkar did not present a specific definition or theory of social justice, his writings and speeches elucidate various principles aimed at establishing a fair and inclusive social order. Ambedkar advocated for a social system characterized by right relations among individuals in all aspects of life, promoting unity, equality, and mutual respect. He emphasized the equal worth of men and women, the recognition of human rights, benevolence, sympathy, and tolerance towards others. Key aspects of his vision included the abolition of caste distinctions, universal education and property ownership, and fostering goodwill and gentleness among citizens. Central to Ambedkar's concept of justice was the eradication of stark inequalities perpetuated by the hierarchical caste system prevalent in Hindu society. He criticized the system's inherent discrimination and the privileged position accorded to Brahmins, emphasizing the need to dismantle caste-based privileges and dominance. From Ambedkar's writings and speeches, five fundamental principles for dispensing justice in society emerge:

1. Establishment of a society based on equality, liberty, and fraternity.
2. Empowering individuals to serve as the foundation for all social purposes.
3. Promotion of democracy across political, economic, and social domains.
4. Implementation of democratic principles through constitutional measures.
5. Breaking the monopoly of the upper strata on political power to ensure democratic governance.

These principles encapsulate Ambedkar's vision for a just and equitable society, where every individual enjoys equal rights and opportunities, regardless of caste, class, or social status.

Agitation as a instrument for social Justice

In his pursuit of human equality in India, Ambedkar primarily employed agitation as his primary strategy. His initial foray into activism involved demanding the opening of a water tank for public use, which had been exclusively reserved for the upper castes. This symbolic gesture challenged the entrenched caste hierarchy and served as a rallying point for marginalized communities. Recognizing the power of media as a tool for advocacy, Ambedkar utilized newspapers as a means of communication with his followers. Through publications like *MookNayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharath*, he effectively reached a wide audience, disseminating his ideas and garnering support for his cause. His astute editorial skills and strategic use of print media amplified the voices of the oppressed and brought attention to their struggles.

Furthermore, leveraging his education and expertise, Ambedkar skilfully navigated the political landscape to secure tangible gains for marginalized communities. One of his significant achievements was the establishment of a separate electorate for untouchables in a political arena dominated by upper-caste interests. This move increased the political representation and agency of marginalized groups in a predominantly hierarchical system. Ambedkar's adept use of agitation, coupled with his strategic approach to advocacy and activism, played a pivotal role in challenging systemic inequalities and advancing the cause of human equality in India. His legacy as a champion of social justice continues to inspire generations to confront oppression and strive for a more equitable society.

Social justice through Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's

In response to the deeply entrenched caste-based social system that systematically dehumanized Sudras and untouchables, Ambedkar dedicated himself to eliminating the social, educational, and cultural disparities faced by lower castes. Recognizing that the caste system inherently produced outcastes, he galvanized marginalized communities with the motto: "Educate, Agitate, and Unite." Through his leadership, he instilled in them values of self-respect, dignity, and a fervent determination to assert their rights. Ambedkar's inaugural public protest involved defiantly drinking water from a public tank, Choudar-Talab, reserved exclusively for the upper castes. This symbolic act disrupted the pervasive inequality suffered by untouchables, who were denied access to basic amenities like

drinking water due to their caste status. Seeking to restore the dignity of untouchables within society, Ambedkar sought a religion that would liberate them from the shackles of caste hierarchy. He rejected Hinduism for its failure to uphold principles of equality and justice, declaring his departure from the religion during a provincial conference in 1935. Analyzing the Varna system, he proposed Buddhism as a viable alternative, citing its emphasis on understanding, compassion, and equality as essential for emancipating the oppressed.

Ambedkar vehemently criticized the neglect and exploitation suffered by depressed classes, attributing their plight to both social apathy and British colonial policies. He believed that dismantling the caste system was a prerequisite for achieving political empowerment and national unity. His pro-British stance in the initial stages of his struggle stemmed from his conviction that addressing internal inequalities was essential before engaging in broader freedom struggles. Recognizing the urgent need to address the social aspirations of marginalized communities, Ambedkar tirelessly advocated for their rights through legislative and social pressure. His unwavering dedication to social reform and empowerment resulted in significant shifts in societal attitudes and structures. While Mahatma Gandhi also advocated for caste reform, Ambedkar's approach was far more radical, challenging the very foundations of the caste system. Despite differing attitudes and methods, both leaders contributed to the ongoing struggle against caste-based discrimination in India.

Against the structures of economic injustice

The traditional economic structure of Indian society, entrenched in caste-based divisions, lacked mechanisms for investment and economic advancement based on available means of production. The rigid hereditary division of labor inherent in casteism hindered economic justice for the oppressed sections of society, resulting in a stagnant economic landscape devoid of both horizontal and vertical mobility. Ambedkar advocated for the pursuit of economic equality in conjunction with social equality, emphasizing the necessity of constitutional safeguards. He believed that transitioning from a feudal and semi-capitalist economy to a more equitable one required the implementation of state socialism alongside parliamentary democracy. Addressing the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, he highlighted these concerns, stating, "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In

politics, we will have equality, but in social and economic life, we will have inequality.” He warned that persisting in such contradictions would jeopardize political democracy, stressing the urgency of resolving the disparity between political and economic equality. Ambedkar underscored the imperative of rectifying these inequalities to prevent the disenfranchised from undermining the political democracy painstakingly constructed by the Assembly.

Ambedkarite vision is so unique

Although Ambedkar’s initial campaigns for access to public drinking water and Hindu temples faced challenges and achieved only partial success, his activism catalyzed a significant social transformation from a Brahminical social system to one centered on human values. In essence, his efforts mirrored the European Renaissance, which redefined human potential and liberated it from ecclesiastical constraints. Ambedkar’s framework for reconceptualizing Indian society has yielded outcomes that no other approach could have accomplished. His drafting of the Indian constitution as a politically and legally emancipating document was a monumental endeavor aimed at envisioning a just social order. His initiatives touched upon various aspects of human life, bringing about political, social, economic, and spiritual transformations. Ambedkar’s perspective on democracy underscores his fundamental emphasis on human equality, viewing democracy as a mode of communal living rooted in social relationships among people constituting society.

He asserted that governance is essential for maintaining peace and prosperity, particularly when individuals fail to adhere to laws and order. Such governance is the cornerstone of a true democratic society. Despite differing opinions among Indian leaders, many cooperated with Ambedkar’s vision of justice. Recently, Ambedkar has been embraced as a political trailblazer by the BSP and even the Congress party, which commemorated Kranti Diwas on his birthday.

Conclusion

Ambedkar’s vision of emancipating the untouchables was firmly grounded in the principles of justice, equality, fraternity, and liberty. This essay has endeavored to encapsulate his broad and insightful vision through the recurring struggles of his life. In this exploration, we have highlighted the significance of agitation and adherence to constitutionalism

as pivotal elements in his comprehensive agenda of social reform. Even decades after articulating his vision, it remains a beacon of hope for the oppressed in India, offering them emancipatory possibilities unmatched by any other ideology. What sets apart the strength of the Ambedkarite vision is its intrinsic connection to Ambedkar's own life, which epitomized emancipation. He translated his lived experiences into a visionary framework, drawing from everyday struggles to shape his vision. Alongside his community, he forged a path that continues to challenge the socio-political, economic, and religious structures of Indian society, deeply entrenched as they are in the caste-based notions of purity and pollution.

References:

1. Ambedkar, B. R. (1979). *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches, Education Department, Govt of Maharashtra, compiled Vasant Moon, 1.
2. Ambedkar, B. R., & Moon, V. (1994). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches (Vol. 13)*. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.
3. Jatava D.R. (2000). *B.R. Ambedkar: A vision of man and morals*. Abd Publisher
4. <https://cafedissensusblog.com/2015/07/16/dr-b-r-ambedkars-vision-of-dalit-emancipation-through-social-justice/>
5. Ambedkar, B.R. (1945). *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. Bombay: Thacker & Co.
6. Ambedkar, B.R. (1957). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Bombay: Siddharth College Publications.
7. Rege, Sharmila. (2006). *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios*. Zubaan.
8. Paik, Shailaja. (2014). *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*. Routledge.
9. Kumar, Raj. (2006). *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. Orient Blackswan.

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.

About the License:

© The Authors 2024. The text of this article is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.