

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Role in Shaping the Indian Electoral System Hanumanthappa N.

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ABSTRACT:

This article explores Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's foundational and transformative role in shaping the Indian electoral system. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Ambedkar viewed the ballot box as a vital instrument for social revolution and addressing systemic caste injustices. His profound commitment to social equality and political democracy led to the constitutional adoption of key features, including Universal Adult Franchise (Article 326) and the establishment of an Independent Election Commission (Article 324) to ensure fairness and integrity. Furthermore, he secured Reserved Seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Articles 330–334) to guarantee fair representation for marginalized communities, overcoming the opposition to separate electorates via the Poona Pact. Ambedkar's vision ensured that India's democracy was fundamentally inclusive and dedicated to justice.

KEYWORDS:

Constitutional Democracy, Electoral Fairness, Reserved Seats, Universal Adult Franchise, Election Commission.

Introduction:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar regarded the ballot box as a transformative instrument for social revolution, embedding democratic values within the very fabric of political participation to challenge systemic caste injustices and promote social equality.

our Nation current election system was largely designed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The constitutional foundations that currently govern Indian elections were formed by his profound awareness of political democracy and social inequity. Ambedkar thought that in a caste-divided society, the right to vote was essential to guaranteeing justice and equality.

His book "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables" critiques electoral politics in colonial India, highlighting the struggles over separate electorates and political safeguards for Dalits.

His speeches in the Constituent Assembly and Parliament, compiled in volumes such as "Speeches of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Rajya Sabha," discuss elections as a tool for social emancipation and political participation.

In 1930–32 at Round Table Conferences He was the representative of the Depressed Classes at these conferences held in London to discuss constitutional reforms for India. Here, he argued for separate electorates for Dalits, believing that in a deeply hierarchical society, this was the only way to ensure their genuine political representation and prevent the "tyranny of the majority."

The 1932 Poona Pact was a crucial compromise.¹ The British first agreed to Ambedkar's demand for distinct electorates in the Communal Award. Mahatma Gandhi was against it, which resulted in the Poona Pact. In return demanding a much larger number of reserved seats for the Depressed Classes inside the general electorate, Ambedkar consented to abandon the demand for separate electorates.

Objectives:

1. To ensure that underrepresented groups, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are fairly represented in legislatures via reserved seats.
2. To promote equality, justice, and brotherhood by fighting for social and economic rights for all citizens.
3. To create an unbiased, independent election administration in order to preserve electoral integrity and fairness.
4. To put into effect electoral laws (Representation of People's Acts, 1950 & 1951) that allow elections to be conducted smoothly and legally.
5. To allow minority to participate in politics and shield them against tyranny by the majority.
6. To establish policies that promote inclusivity and the involvement of underprivileged communities in the democratic process, such as reservations and the elimination of untouchability.

Literature Review:

1. J. Benjamin, "Democratic Polity and Electoral System in India," 2016 – Discusses secular democracy and electoral principles in India including Ambedkar's contributions.

2. Zeeshan Husain, "Democracy, Not Majoritarianism: Relevance of B. R. Ambedkar," 2025 – Analyzes Ambedkar's thoughts on democratic equality, minority rights, and electoral representation
3. Article on "Why Did Ambedkar Centralize the Conduct of Elections in India?" (2025) He Explains amendment to centralize elections and his rationale against provincial biases
4. "Ambedkar, Gandhi and Patel: The Making of India's Electoral System" (2017) Covers debates and political engagements shaping India's electoral system, including reserved seats for Dalits and minorities
5. Vundru, Raja Sekhar, Pai, and Thorat – Work on Ambedkar's constitutional vision and minority protections in Indian democracy

Ambedkar Vision on Indian Elector Democracy:

1. Ambedkar's Democratic Vision:

Ambedkar maintained that social democracy must be the foundation of political democracy. He saw elections as a means of strengthening underprivileged communities rather than just a way to select politicians. Ambedkar believed that for political democracy to be meaningful, everyone ought to participate.

2. Universal Adult Franchise:

Despite a high rate of illiteracy, India implemented universal adult suffrage at the time of independence.² Ambedkar's claim that denying someone the right to vote on the basis of their property or level of education would maintain inequity was broadly agreed by the Constituent Assembly. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he made sure that every adult citizen was guaranteed the right to vote under Article 326

3. Safeguards for Marginalized Communities

Ambedkar urged the downtrodden and marginalized sections of society to raise their living standards by acquiring political power through active participation in elections. He organized the Independent Labour Party and contested provincial elections to demonstrate the power of political engagement for social change.³ He ensured the continuation of reserved seats in legislatures for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He argued that political safeguards were essential for communities historically excluded from public life. He designed constitutional

mechanisms—such as delimitation and safeguards in Part 15—to ensure fair representation.

4. Establishment of an Independent Election Commission⁴

Ambedkar emphasised that elections must be conducted by an impartial body free from executive interference. This principle led to the adoption of Article 324, establishing the Election Commission of India as an autonomous constitutional authority. Ambedkar insisted that electoral management must be above suspicion and independent in character.

5. Secret Ballot and Electoral Procedure

Ambedkar supported the adoption of the secret ballot, arguing it was necessary to prevent coercion and caste pressure. He also contributed to creating independent electoral rolls and uniform procedures across the Union.

He Warning on Electoral Corruption Although the Anti-Defection Law was enacted decades later, Ambedkar had already warned that unprincipled politics and party defections could undermine parliamentary democracy.¹⁶ His vision indirectly informed later reforms to strengthen democratic ethics.

He believed caste would inevitably influence voting patterns, calling caste “the greatest obstacle to political democracy.” His warnings continue to be relevant in contemporary democratic studies.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s book/speech in "The Grammar of Anarchy" stated that⁵

On 25th November 1949 in constitute assembly Dr B R Ambedkar gave a famous speech often called of anarchy of anarchy

1. Emphasis on holding fast to constitutional methods for achieving social and economic objectives.
2. Strong rejection of unconstitutional methods such as civil disobedience, non-cooperation, and satyagraha when constitutional means are available.
3. Warning that reliance on revolutionary methods despite a good constitution leads to anarchic situations and ultimately failure.
4. Recognition of the contradiction that while political equality (one man, one vote) is recognized, social and economic inequalities persist.

5. Concern that continuing social and economic inequality threatens the very structure of political democracy.
6. Urging the need to remove these contradictions to maintain democracy and prevent societal division or class war.
7. The aspiration of down-trodden classes to govern themselves must be addressed constitutionally to avoid unrest.
8. Stressed the necessity of equality and fraternity in all spheres of life for sustaining democratic governance. Cautioned against placing creed or party above the country to avoid jeopardizing independence and democracy.
9. Dismissal of hero worship: Bhakti in religion may be Road salvation of soul, but in politics hero worship is a sure road to degradation and tool eventual dictatorship

Conclusion:

Dr B.R Ambedkar's contributions—universal franchise, electoral safeguards, the Election Commission, and the secret ballot—created the foundation of India's electoral democracy.

His efforts to transform the Indian electoral system from a mere administrative weapon into a powerful tool of social revolution have left an enduring legacy. His fight against caste oppression influenced his strong commitment to equality, which led him to establish three fundamental pillars: the establishment of an Independent Election Commission to protect the integrity of the electoral procedure; the revolutionary inclusion of Universal Adult Franchise to guarantee political equality; and the essential protection of Reserved Constituencies to ensure the representation of marginalized Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In the end, Ambedkar's vision made sure that India's political system was founded on the timeless promise of social justice and true inclusive representation rather than just the idea of one person, one vote.

End Note:

1. Poona Pact (Agreement), signed September 24, 1932; Full text available in various historical and constitutional documents.
2. The Constitution of India, Article 326; B.R. Ambedkar, Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD), Vol. XI (1949).
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4. The Constitution of India, Article 324; B.R. Ambedkar, CAD, Vol. VIII (1949), Debate on Draft Article 289 (now 324).
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5. Ambedkar's speech at the Round Table Conference, 1930.
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7. Constitution of India, Article 324. CAD, Vol. VIII, 1949.
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