

**REVISITING AMBEDKAR'S STATES AND
MINORITIES (1947): A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
STATE SOCIALISM, LAND NATIONALISATION,
AND COLLECTIVE FARMING**

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ABSTRACT

Though often quoted for defending minority rights, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 1947 memo to India's Constitution makers hides something sharper beneath. Submitted on March 15 to the Fundamental Rights sub-panel, States and Minorities sits oddly in history - famous yet half-read. Its boldest part, Article II, Section II, Clause 4, slips past most eyes. There, farms would belong to the state. Insurance too. Major industries either run by government or tightly watched. Little attention has gone to this trio. Yet it forms more than scattered ideas. Read closely, the document reveals a steady vision: land, labor, and production reshaped under public control. Not random fixes. A full blueprint drawn in legal tone. What looks like policy detail is actually an economic creed dressed as law. Looking closely at how ideas connect, the work follows Ambedkar's way of tying landless lower-caste farmers, rural hardship, and systemic risk among Scheduled Castes to missing economic self-rule. Instead of copying Soviet-style farms, his idea for shared farming stood apart - built on ending landlord control, giving field workers joint rights through state oversight, reshaping crop production around mutual effort. Placed beside talks of that time about Nehru's development plans or Gandhi's moral

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ownership, his vision stands out, especially turning economic promises into enforceable legal rights. Overlooking such plans in today's farm policies shows a closed-off thinking that needs reopening, now more than ever with rising farmer deaths, unstable renting, and Dalits without land. Returning to States and Minorities does two things: shifts view beyond seeing Ambedkar only as a social changer; brings forward a strong base for fresh approaches to India's farming governance shaped by his thought.

KEYWORDS: *B.R. Ambedkar, States and Minorities, State Socialism, Land Nationalisation, Collective Farming, Agrarian Constitutionalism.*

1. Introduction

Though often overlooked today, States and Minorities (1947) stand quietly apart in the body of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's work when it comes to modern studies on land and economy. Handed to a sub-committee of India's constitution-makers on 15 March 1947 by the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, it usually surfaces only to show how much Ambedkar cared about safeguarding disadvantaged groups. Still, beneath that surface hums a bold blueprint - one of the sharpest plans for reshaping wealth and production ever put forward during the making of India's Constitution. Hidden inside Article II, Section II, Clause 4 beats a call for government control over farmland, shared cultivation systems, public management of major industries, and state-run insurance schemes. It wasn't by chance this part got left out - and it matters. Most scholars in India tend to split Ambedkar's ideas into two: one side wrote the Constitution's core rights and guiding goals. Then there's the activist figure, challenging caste and religion while turning toward Buddhist practice. Yet his views on economy, especially how farming ties to justice, stay mostly untouched. Because of that gap, today's talks about struggling farmers, unfair rent systems, taking land for projects, or why Dalits own so little rarely look back to what he laid down when building a new nation began. Looking closer at how state socialism, land ownership by the nation, and shared farming connect, this piece builds on ideas found in States and Minorities. Instead of surveys or numbers, meaning

is drawn through careful reading, letting the text speak as it stands. Placed alongside Ambedkar's earlier writings - like *Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies* (1918) and *The Problem of the Rupee* (1923) - it fits into a broader pattern of thought. Later speeches during constitution-making add further context. Not tested with data, the focus stays on whether these concepts hold together logically. Why such ideas faded after independence becomes part of the inquiry too. Understanding silence around them matters just as much as the arguments themselves. One way into the story is through its five clear sections. After setting the stage, part one digs up where the 1947 memo came from, both in time and thought. Rather than leap ahead, it pauses on how past ideas shaped that moment. Next comes Ambedkar's view of state socialism, treated here as something built into law, not just policy. Instead of vague ideals, he gave it structure, rooted in rights. Then follows his plan for land - how taking control could shift power. Ownership wasn't left untouched; it was rethought from the ground up. One way to look at it is through a lens of shared land work, shaped by one thinker's vision. Another places those ideas beside older views inspired by Nehru and Gandhi, seeing how they shift current thinking about India's farming roots.

2. Historical and Intellectual Context of States and Minorities (1947)

Back then, minds were especially sharp. As the Constituent Assembly got going in December 1946, work started in earnest on shaping the nation's foundational words. While J.B. Kripalani headed a panel asking groups to share thoughts on rights, B.R. Ambedkar sent in his own. His voice mattered - shaped by deep thinking, yes - but also because he spoke for the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, an organisation under his leadership. To grasp the memo's thinking, look at it through three layers. Long before 1947, Ambedkar shaped sharp views on India's economy across close to thirty years of writing. His first economic piece, *Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies* (1918), pointed straight at broken-up farmland as the main block to better crop output - then suggested shared farming could fix it. Later came *The Problem of the Rupee* (1923); that one plus *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* (1925) proved he knew fiscal policy and government budgets well. Come 1947, all those ideas folded together into a full plan where

the state drives deep change in how the economy runs. Later came the memo, shaped by ongoing arguments among Indian nationalists about what kind of economy should follow independence. While one vision drew from Gandhi's ideas - small self-reliant villages and shared control over wealth - a different approach favored big-picture government direction alongside private enterprise, seen clearly in both the 1931 Karachi meeting and the 1944 Bombay blueprint. What Ambedkar put forward did not line up with either path. Instead, he imagined a system where socialist principles were built into law, responding directly to how caste had long twisted access to resources and work. Out of nowhere, Ambedkar saw something others missed - how caste and land tie together in ways most theories fail to capture. While some viewed property rights as fair on their own terms, he didn't buy it. Instead of folding caste into class like traditional left thinkers did, he pointed at history: denying Dalits land wasn't just economic, it built hierarchy itself. Over hundreds of years, exclusion from owning soil created a working poor group rooted in oppression. For them, equal chances meant little without actual transfer of resources - tools, fields, means to survive. State-led sharing had to happen; fairness alone wouldn't cut it. By the time the 1947 memo arrived, these threads wove into something deeper than what official paperwork usually allows.

3. State Socialism in Ambedkar's Constitutional Framework

What stands out in States and Minorities is how state socialism shifts from an ideal to a binding rule. Deep inside Article II, Section II, Clause 4, Ambedkar insists the Indian Constitution must require certain conditions. Among them: essential industries belong solely to the government. Even core sectors that aren't classified as vital still fall under public ownership, operated either directly or through state-created bodies. Insurance rests exclusively with the State, no exceptions. Farming too becomes a domain managed by the government. What set Ambedkar's vision apart wasn't just its goals but where he put them - inside the constitution itself. While Nehru saw public control of industry as something lawmakers could change later, Ambedkar wanted it fixed at the core. Unlike the USSR, where such systems came through upheaval, his approach used legal permanence. He insisted on embedding state socialism directly into the nation's founding rules. This meant future governments couldn't

simply vote it away. Because it would live within the Fundamental Rights, citizens could take violations to court. A quiet strength lay in that placement - not shouted, yet enforceable. Explaining this constitutional foundation comes straight from the notes tied to the memo. Not having fair access to money and resources makes a mockery of voting rights, says Ambedkar. Just saying everyone is equal under law does nothing if huge wealth gaps stay untouched. Minority safety, especially for Scheduled Castes, needs more than just written promises in a charter. Real control held by powerful groups grows out of owning land and capital. Take away their grip on these things only then can true freedom survive beyond paper declarations. This idea links Ambedkar to a wider movement - seen in the 1919 Weimar and 1917 Mexican constitutions - that mixed basic freedoms with guarantees on work and welfare. Still, his version stands apart in key ways. Unlike those models, he put economic promises right into enforceable rights, not vague goals. More sharply still, his case turns on caste itself - not general fairness, but breaking down wealth patterns that feed caste power. Keep in mind, Ambedkar's version of state socialism did not mean supporting top-down control like in Soviet-style regimes. Instead, his writings clearly show that public ownership could work within democratic frameworks - where voting rights matter, freedoms are protected, and laws apply equally. He opposed the idea, common among liberals, that government must stay hands-off when it comes to who owns factories or land. To him, staying out meant quietly helping those already holding power through wealth and caste privilege. Looking back, the idea of public control over insurance stands out. Back then, private firms ran most coverage during 1947, often leaving rural areas and lower castes behind. Because of this gap, Ambedkar pushed for government-only operation years before it actually happened. His stance came long before life policies were taken over in 1956, even earlier than broader plans in 1972.

4. Land Nationalisation:

A Textual Reading Land becoming state property stands out as the boldest part of the States and Minorities plan. Right there in Article II, Section II, Clause 4 it states farming must fall under government control. Behind that line sits a detailed explanation - existing claims on farms, along with insurance and farmland owned

privately, will shift to public hands. Owners, renters, even those holding loans against the land won't walk away empty handed. Instead, they'll receive payment through special bonds matching what their holdings are worth. How exactly that value gets decided? A legal body, yet unnamed, will sort it out later. Looking closely at the wording reveals three key aspects. The takeover covers every existing right on farmland, touching owners, renters, even lenders holding mortgages. Unlike reforms decades later that only limited how much one could own while keeping private property untouched, this plan went further. Those mid-century policies trimmed excess holdings but kept ownership systems standing. Not so here - Ambedkar aimed to erase private control over farm plots completely. Next comes repayment through debentures instead of money. That way, the government sidesteps a sudden drain on funds while turning past landowners into temporary lenders to the state - holders of promises that fade after years. As those notes expire and get settled one by one, so too does the economic role they once played. What makes this approach work so well? It meets legal duty head-on yet quietly dismantles old hierarchies at the same time. Payment happens just as required, but the power behind the title vanishes slowly, without drama. Value gets set by a legal body, not what buyers and sellers decide. Right from the start, this move sees trouble ahead - like fights over free speech or land laws where worth sparks argument. Ambedkar builds it into the constitution: how things are valued belongs to legislation, never market guesses. Later on, only after long disputes, did the 25th and 44th changes seal this idea into rule. Land becoming state property made sense to Ambedkar because of how caste shaped access to soil. Through twenty years of speaking and writing, he kept showing a pattern - unequal layers of caste matched by uneven control over farmland. Those at the top held deeds to fields. Mid-tier groups tilled them under lease arrangements. At the bottom, people from Scheduled Castes worked plots they did not own. Rights claimed alone changed little. What shifted things? Ownership moving en masse from dominant castes to government hands. Then came reallocation - each farmer getting ground based on need, never bloodline. Though many feared state control might bring sluggish systems, Ambedkar saw deeper flaws elsewhere. Not in red tape - but in a setup where

tiny plots worked by poor farmers had long blocked real progress. He argued such division wasn't freedom - it was failure dressed as tradition. Instead, shared farming under public stewardship could shift agriculture forward. With updated tools and group effort, this model held more promise than endless repetition of broken patterns. Back then, Ambedkar skipped handing plots directly to farmers. Though he looked into it by 1918 in Small Holdings in India, that path felt flawed - breaking up land further hurt output too much. What stuck? Farming together on government-held fields balanced fairness with results.

5. Collective Farming:

Ambedkar's Cooperative Model Collective farming makes up the third part of the States and Minorities structure. After suggesting that farmland should belong to the government and private ownership must end, Ambedkar explains how plots would go to teams of farmers working together. Instead of handing leases to single people, they'd go to organized groups. Working the soil happens as a team effort, never alone. Rules guiding how crops are grown will come from state direction. A short written foundation supports this idea, yet it leaves no room for confusion. Right away, the explanation makes clear that villagers get access to land regardless of social rank or belief system through an arrangement where landlord, tenant, and landless worker simply do not exist. That one line holds tight the bold core of Ambedkar's rural dream - wiping out at once the trio of roles shaping countryside life across generations. One sweep ends what long defined power on the soil. What sets this model apart from Soviet-style collectivisation and Gandhian ideals comes down to structure. Instead of large communes spanning regions or nations, farming happens at the village level here. That choice ties back to how Indian agriculture actually functioned - rooted in villages. Change, then, had to start where people already worked the land. Yet while Gandhi saw the village as a self-governing entity, Ambedkar treated it differently. His version operates under state oversight, shaped by cooperation but guided by policy. Open to everyone in the village, regardless of background, joining the cooperative marks a sharp turn from old patterns. Central to this shift, the rule carries weight not just in policy but in practice. Instead of following tradition, where work and ties ran strictly through caste roles shaped

by the jajmani way, something new takes root. By forming a shared space untouched by hierarchy, the cooperative erases old borders. People once locked out - especially those from communities long placed at the margins - now step in as full partners. Their place within it stands firm, no longer questioned. One thing matters here. State control stays strong over how farming happens, what goes into it, besides who gets what comes out. That detail sets Ambedkar's idea apart from older cooperative thinking built on full independence. His version does not stand free from government reach. It operates under rules shaped by fairness goals and new methods in farming tech. How workers get their due follows clear lines too. Each team receives support like seeds, fertilisers, water, tools - all covered by the state. Once harvest time arrives, output splits after taking away the portion owed to authorities. So the farmer shifts role entirely - no longer someone risking everything alone but part of a shared system backed by public resources.

6. Theoretical Distinctiveness:

Ambedkar, Nehru, and Gandhi When placed beside the era's leading ideas - Nehru's planned development, say, or Gandhi's idea of stewardship - the value of the States and Minorities model begins to show. What stands out is how differently it frames power and belonging, not as gifts from above but as claims rooted in presence. Instead of top-down visions guiding change, this approach insists on recognition built through coexistence. Where others imagine progress led by elites, it turns attention to those often left unnamed in grand narratives. Its strength lies less in policy detail than in shifting who gets to shape the future. Seen this way, inclusion isn't an afterthought - it shapes the structure itself. Starting with the 1951 Five-Year Plans, Nehru's economic approach gave government control over big industries and public works - yet left farming in private hands, though land ceilings were imposed. Because of this mix, factories advanced through central guidance while farms stayed split up, starved of investment, layered by caste hierarchy. Had Ambedkar's vision taken root, such division might never have formed; his plan pulled agriculture into state management too, applying uniform development rules across both city and countryside alike. Landlords giving up extra land - that idea sat at the core of Gandhian trusteeship, shaped in Gandhi's plan and

pushed later by Vinoba Bhave through Bhoodan. Willing change in attitude, not force, guided that approach - coercion tossed aside over its clash with peace. Ambedkar called such faith baseless; after all, when owning property ties directly into caste dominance, why expect those on top to step down? What followed told the story - the Bhoodan campaign moved little ground, even after years, proving his doubt had weight. Ambedkar's approach stands apart because of three core ideas. Not just policies, rights - state control becomes something people are entitled to. Because land issues tie directly into caste hierarchies, one cannot shift without changing the other. While others force a decision between rigid systems or hands-off markets, his model blends public ownership with real self-rule. It's worth noting how this method changes legal thinking. Putting economic promises into Fundamental Rights was Ambedkar's way of ensuring courts could act on them. Yet later, when the Drafting Committee and more members of the Constituent Assembly moved those rights to the Directive Principles - where they sit beyond court reach thanks to Article 37 - the whole shape of his design shifted. His vision of binding guarantees turned instead into hopes left to government choice. If his first version had carried the day, India might now see economic rights through a completely different legal lens, affecting farming, workers, and welfare in ways we can only partly imagine.

7. Conclusion

Looking closely at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's States and Minorities (1947), this piece examines how state socialism, land nationalisation, and collective farming form a linked set of ideas. Rather than isolated policy points, they emerge as parts of a deeper vision - where constitution, economy, and social justice intertwine. Behind them lies Ambedkar's long-standing focus on caste hierarchies, ownership patterns, and democratic rights. These elements do not stand apart; instead, they build on one another through his critical lens. What appears as economic planning reveals itself, slowly, as a challenge to entrenched power. Seen whole, the argument reshapes how we view equality in nation-building. Not an add-on but a foundation, it runs beneath surface-level reforms. His thought connects structures often kept separate. Through careful reasoning, old boundaries blur. At stake is not just land or labour - but who belongs in the political

community. One key point stands out right away. Not copying Soviet ideas or Western models, Ambedkar shaped his own version of state socialism to tackle how caste strips people of land. Instead of following foreign blueprints, he built an approach rooted in India's realities. His idea for taking over farmland went much further than later policies that just set limits on ownership. While others adjusted existing systems, he pushed for wiping out private control of farms completely. A constitutionally backed method using debentures would pay owners, yet shift all land into public hands. Another twist: farming would continue, but under new rules. The land stays with the state, yet daily work runs through cooperatives without caste barriers. These worker groups manage production directly, balancing fairness with practical results. Efficiency does not get lost, even as justice takes center stage. What emerges is neither imported theory nor half-measure reform. It becomes something else entirely - grounded, bold, reimagined from the ground up. One reason this model matters so much today? It speaks directly to farming struggles now shaking India. Crises like rising farmer suicides, unstable tenant rights, crushing debt loads, bare ownership among Dalits - these keep piling up. Existing answers - pushed either as market fixes or selective aid programs - simply haven't touched deep roots of harm. Though hard to apply fully, Ambedkar's thinking stands apart. Few match its blend: sharp theory grounded in clear constitutional vision. Leaving out this framework from everyday farming conversations isn't just a missed fact. It shuts down new ways of thinking. Going back to States and Minorities does not mean copying it entirely. Instead, it means pulling lost ideas into view - ideas that today's talks about land, caste, and fairness in rural India still need. Without them, those discussions lack depth. Future work should grow from rediscovering the text, looking at how people understood it, what similar writings exist, and why places like Karnataka matter now, where farm troubles and landless Dalits keep facing problems Ambedkar named long ago.

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