

MARGINALIZATION OF THE ELDERLY IN MODERN INDIA: AN AMBEDKARITE PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

By 2050, older people in India - those sixty and above - are expected to number more than 340 million. Though the Constitution promises fairness, respect, and justice, many seniors still live without support. Especially affected are elders from lower castes, tribal groups, and poor backgrounds. They often deal with being ignored by systems meant to help them. Left out socially, they struggle financially too. Invisible in policies, their voices rarely shape decisions. Looking at this issue today means seeing it through ideas put forward by B.R. Ambedkar. His view of justice demands dismantling rigid hierarchies. It also centers on upholding what the Constitution stands for morally. Only then can society become genuinely equal. Looking at how elders get pushed aside through Ambedkar's eyes reveals deeper problems than simple neglect. His challenge to Hindu hierarchy, together with a vision where unity holds democracy together, opens new paths forward. Rights for those crushed by power gaps mattered deeply to him - a view that fits today's aging struggles well. Left unseen, old age hardship ties back to rigid birth-based ranks, male-dominated rules, and profit-first thinking. These were dangers he warned would hollow out fairness if left unchecked. Actual numbers, laws like the 2007 act meant to support seniors, plus flaws in current aid plans help build a fresh approach. One shaped by his ideas places dignity, shared

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duty, and government answerability at its core. When beliefs about who matters do not shift - along with systems built on outdated assumptions - promises made long ago lose meaning. The dream written into India's founding charter stays distant unless change runs deep.

KEYWORDS: *Elderly Marginalization, Ambedkarite Social Justice, Caste And Aging, Constitutional Morality, Elder Rights, Social Exclusion.*

Introduction

Ambedkarite ideology places a high value on who is treated fairly in a democracy. According to B.R. Ambedkar, democracy is a shared existence based on freedom, dignity, and belonging rather than merely a system of governance. He influenced India's Constitution, opposed caste violence, and transformed generations' perspectives. Even so, many people continue to live outside of true justice years later. Elderly individuals often go unnoticed and experience some of the worst neglect. Approximately 10% of India's population, or 138 million, are elderly. By the middle of the century, that number is expected to have more than doubled. Thought lags behind the rapid changes in numbers. The majority of the time, older folks appear in policy as issues that need to be fixed or as marginalized people. Systems seldom regard them as complete participants with a right to justice. This vision gap is supported by reports from UNFPA and HelpAge India. Though the nation changes, opinions remain unchanged. Elderly folks who are left behind are not accidentally forgotten. Their exclusion stems from systemic divisions based on caste, wealth, gender, and location, which influenced Ambedkar's life and work. According to his perspective, marginalizing elderly reveals a society devoid of justice, harmony, and fundamental respect. Here, shifting attention reveals what quiet conceals: an issue that has been neglected for too long. The remainder comes after this. We'll look at how older people are excluded in modern India next. The following delves into Ambedkar's main theories regarding social justice. Next is an investigation on the intersection between caste, age, and economic standing. A detailed examination of current

laws and practices follows; this is covered in Section 5. Ambedkar's theories in Section 6 raise concerns about the Indian government's approach to meeting the needs of the elderly. In Section 7, the duality of care and neglect is highlighted. Care can be found where you might expect it-at home and within families. Another potential arises from those realizations: Ambedkar's vision of justice, which is meticulously outlined in Section 8. Section 9 is where things end.

Specific Objectives

Older people in today's India face different life situations depending on their social background. One way to understand this is by looking at family origins, income levels, and whether someone is male or female. Differences in status show up clearly when these factors overlap. Some groups struggle more than others as they age. Access to support often ties back to long-standing social divisions. Patterns emerge when we examine who gets left behind. Lives shaped early tend to stay that way later. Not everyone grows old under equal circumstances. Start with Ambedkar's idea: destroy caste for real fairness. His way leans on rules that protect everyone, not just traditions. Unity matters more than hierarchy when respecting older people. The government must act, not just watch. Fairness grows where laws treat age like dignity. Justice means lifting elders without ignoring their place in change. Older people from Dalit, Adivasi, and poor backgrounds often face deeper exclusion because of how caste, income level, and age overlap. Their struggles grow sharper when these factors combine. Living at this crossroads means more barriers in daily life. Years of disadvantage pile up as they get older. Social position shapes access to care, dignity, and support. Experiences differ widely even within marginalized groups. Age adds pressure where status already limits opportunity. Economic hardship tightens its grip over time. Caste identity can deepen isolation in later years. Conditions faced by elders reflect long-standing structural gaps. Looking at India's rules for older people through Ambedkar's ideas shows gaps worth noticing. Not just laws like the 2007 senior care act matter, yet how they play out does too. Instead of only listing rights, think about who gets left behind. Pension plans such as IGNOAPS aim to help, still many stay without support. Because fairness isn't built into every part. When systems ignore caste and poverty together, results tilt

unevenly. One rule may promise dignity, lived experience often tells another story. Seeing law as a tool demands asking - whose voice shaped it? Laws exist on paper, their real test lies in daily life.

The Elderly in India: Demographic and Social Realities
Older people in India come from many different walks of life. Depending on where they stand in society - by birth, wealth, faith, or place - a person's later years can look very unlike someone else's. Data from a major survey done in 2020 by the International Institute for Population Sciences shows nearly two out of five seniors earn nothing at all, while more than three-quarters rely completely on relatives for money. Life gets harder if you grow old in the countryside; clinics stay far away, buses rarely run, and pensions often never arrive. For older women, especially those who lost their husbands, hardships pile up fast - long-standing customs tied to male dominance and rigid hierarchies strip them of land, silence their voices, mark them as burdens. Older people from Scheduled Castes and Tribes often face deep financial hardship. Denied land, schooling, and steady jobs in the past, many reach later years empty-handed - no property, little saved, no pension checks arriving. Years of being shut out build up until aging becomes a burden weighed down by need and reliance on others. Scarcely more than one in ten seniors working informally - including large numbers of Dalit and Adivasi workers - are covered by safety nets like health benefits or retirement support, an ILO report shows. Left out, older people face hurdles across many parts of life. Health care often treats them like afterthoughts, especially within government-run services. Homes should be safe yet too often become places where mistreatment grows - hurts that aren't always seen. Police records show more incidents reported each year, painting a trend hard to ignore. They rarely have seats at decision-making tables, nor voices heard in debates shaping national priorities. Even plans meant to support well-being tend to overlook their lived realities. India's version of growing old carries deep imbalances built on lines drawn long ago. Caste shapes it. Wealth changes outcomes. Gender tilts the balance further still - echoes of what Ambedkar once named as roots of injustice.

Ambedkar's Philosophy of Social Justice: Core Tenets
At its heart, B.R. Ambedkar's take on social justice isn't one fixed idea

- instead it grows through laws he wrote, talks in politics, arguments during constitution-making, along with sharp views on society. Looking closer, four main ideas stand out clearly here.

Annihilation of Caste: What stands out in Ambedkar's thinking is how he saw caste as the core force behind injustice in India. Not just a way to sort jobs, he wrote in 1936's *Annihilation of Caste*, but a rigid ranking passed down through birth - one that traps people below in lasting disrespect. Though aging affects many, the deep neglect faced by older Dalits and Adivasis comes less from years lived than from where they are placed within caste hierarchies. For them, frailty grows sharper when shaped by lifelong exclusion.

Constitutional Morality: What Ambedkar stressed was not just rules, but a mindset - one shaped by law, not habit. Instead of custom, he looked to the Constitution as the true guide. Loyalty to liberty, equality, and brotherhood mattered more than old ways. During debates, his voice carried a warning: without this loyalty, laws mean nothing. He saw how people often follow tradition even when it hurts others. Older adults in some parts of India face neglect, pushed aside quietly. Their belongings vanish, sometimes handed off unfairly. They fade into corners while families act like everything is normal. These patterns grow from deep-seated beliefs, not justice. When society values age-old practice above fairness, the founding promise breaks down. The document remains written - but ignored. Respect must begin with principle, not preference. That was his point, clear and unyielding.

Fraternity as the Basis of Democracy: Without friendship among people, freedom and fairness crumble fast. He believed real strength comes when everyone feels tied together - when pain felt by someone hits home for others too. When older folks face hardship, mistreatment, or silence, something vital breaks in the group. Seeing elders not as weight but as part of us requires more than laws - it needs fresh eyes on what belonging means. That shift? It begins where respect grows quiet but deep.

State as Instrument of Justice: Ambedkar stood apart from libertarians by embracing government power when it served justice. Because he saw unchecked strength crushing the vulnerable, he insisted on firm legal structures to balance society. When older

people face hardship, his thinking says the system should step in before suffering deepens. A fair nation does not wait - it acts so dignity isn't denied based on birth or age. Protection built into law keeps inequality from becoming inevitable pain.

Intersectionality of Caste, Class, and Age: The Double Marginalization What stands out today in thinking about society - which also fits well within Ambedkar's framework - is how overlapping injustices shape lives. Not separate, these patterns of harm feed into each other. Together they create struggles bigger than just poverty or age alone can explain. Take an older Dalit woman living far from cities. Or a tribal elder forced off ancestral woods. Then there is the aging worker once made to clean waste, now left without support. These people aren't simply old adults facing hardship. Their later years carry weight built through decades: burdened by rank assigned at birth, shaped by economic neglect, often deepened by being female too. Older people from Scheduled Castes face extra hardship - not just because they are elderly, but because of their caste too. Though often overlooked, this double burden shows up clearly in numbers. Instead of pensions, many rely on unstable work past retirement age. Without land records or health coverage, even basic care stays out of reach. Lifetime barriers block wealth building, trapping them in unsafe jobs. Where others find support through family or community ties, such links rarely extend to them. Housing remains poor when caste cuts off access to better resources. Clean water? Often missing where entire neighbourhoods get ignored. Benefits flowing along caste lines tend to skip them entirely. Out in the countryside, old power patterns hold tight. Ambedkar saw it clearly - the village wasn't peaceful unity but cramped control, full of bias and closed minds. That view hits close today. Caste lines still shape who does what, who goes where. Older Dalit and Adivasi residents feel it daily - not just in missing water or meetings, but in being treated like they do not belong. Being left out hurts more than empty hands sometimes.

Legal and Policy Frameworks: Gaps and Challenges Older people in India are covered by laws meant to protect their well-being. Equality under the law is ensured through Article 14 of the country's constitution. Life and freedom matter too - this comes from Article 21. When it comes to aging or disability, Article 41

urges government support without delay. A key piece of legislation - the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act from 2007 - holds family members responsible for care. Disputes find resolution through special tribunals created just for these issues. Financial safety nets, medical access, and community belonging shape the goals laid out in the 2011 policy for seniors. Yet seen through Ambedkar's lens, these rules fall short - not just in design but in practice too. Because the MWPSCA leans on families to care for older people, it ends up strengthening a structure tied to caste hierarchies and male dominance. Care from kin? That idea might mean little when Dalit seniors face hardship or rejection within their own households. Counting on relatives while skipping basic welfare nets means many aging individuals slip through - particularly those childless or cut off from blood ties. Safety vanishes where support should begin. Huge gaps show up right away when looking at how rules actually work on the ground. Not many older people in villages even know about the MWPSCA, especially those from Scheduled Castes or Tribes. Where tribunals do stand, reaching them means long trips through rough terrain while wrestling confusing paperwork. Standing up legally can feel impossible when facing pressure from powerful local families or relatives, something Dalit and Adivasi seniors often endure. Run by the government, the main help comes through IGNOAPS - a program handing out between two hundred and five hundred rupees every month. That sum barely covers anything now, shrinking faster as prices climb for medicine and daily needs. What mattered most to Ambedkar was real impact - did a rule actually lift up people long kept on the margins? Judged by that measure, laws meant to protect older Indians fall short, especially when overlapping burdens of caste, poverty, age, and sex come into play.

The Role of the State: An Ambedkarite Critique Picture this: fairness, to Ambedkar, demanded the state step in. Not hands-off, not watching - involved, deliberate. His thinking grew from British social experiments, American rights traditions, even quiet wisdom of Buddhism. Government, he believed, should clear paths, not stand aside. Give each person ground firm enough to begin. But today? Older Indians wait. Support promised stays just out there. Belief has outrun real change. Ideas race ahead while action drags.

Patches of help for elders across India spring from federal and local efforts, but access swings sharply between areas. Money falls short of actual demands, so existing aids run on empty. Next to neighbours in Asia, the country's financial effort for aging residents makes up a sliver of its economy. Health care lags behind as more elderly require focused treatment. Most medical programs skip deep training on aging, so it is no surprise that specialized senior care remains rare. Because of this gap, clinics often overlook the needs of elderly patients. Hospital wards meant for extended recovery are uncommon, despite older adults frequently battling chronic conditions brought by time. Here's how things really shift. Fairness isn't only about written guidelines. Real equity needs the whole setup to dismantle stubborn barriers that block access. For elders, particularly those from marginalized groups, progress appears when actions are deliberate. Enough pension funds should reach every person, offering a life of respect. Inside Dalit and Adivasi areas, government care hubs must be seen. Where elders live, legal aid stations ought to cluster. Well-being plans start failing when they skip how age shapes life. Today's efforts? Thin, stretched, leaning hard on kin - weak steps where fairness calls for firm ones.

Family, Community, and Social Responsibility Older folks' care in India usually gets shown - on screen or in policy - as something families just naturally handle. Rooted in the idea of multi-generational homes where everyone leans on each other. Yet Ambedkar pushed back hard on that image. To him, Indian households were less about safety, more about caste rules playing out again and again; women held down, kin turned against kin by property quarrels. Older folks leaning on kin feel the strain strongest if they're near the bottom of caste lines. In Dalit households, missing land and education for generations turns supporting elders into tight finances. Hardship plus prejudice pushes youth toward cities in search of jobs, leaving gray-haired parents behind in rural spots. As movement grows for survival, care networks thin - especially where caste walls stand tallest. Leaving home for income widens the gap, hitting communities already crushed by hierarchy. Picture this. Belonging does more than keep some at bay - it pulls others close when times turn rough. Suppose kindness showed up on purpose, not luck. Ambedkar dreamed of eyes meeting eye, fault owned by

many hands, help arriving before the call is made. Out of that ground rise groups fed by local roots - Buddhist thought stirred with Ambedkar's edge - one day firm enough to hold who slips through gaps grown too large. Imagine little clusters blooming: older ones cared for not by rulebook order, yet because nearby voices agree softly, over time. Some corners of Maharashtra hum with quiet trials - Dalit Bandhu weaving ties across generations, meetings where dignity matters more than old routines. Not imposed solutions, these grow low and steady, nourished by a thought: each person counts, especially when age bends the body.

Towards an Ambedkarite Framework for Elder Justice A vision of fairness for older people, shaped by Ambedkar's ideas, stands on five core supports. Start with everyone over sixty getting a steady check each month, no matter their past job, who they live with, or what group they were born into. That money should keep pace when prices rise, tied directly to how much things really cost day to day. Right now, the payments under IGNOAPS fall far short - barely enough to survive on. A real update is overdue; numbers need to jump, not creep upward. Every older person should see healthcare as something they can actually access. When systems put geriatric services into regular clinics, bigger hospitals, and specialized centers alike, care becomes part of everyday reach. Buildings where medical help is given need features that make movement easier for seniors. Workers who visit neighbourhoods ought to understand how aging changes health needs over time. Now think about older people facing both age struggles and caste barriers. When plans ignore how caste shapes hardship later in life, gaps grow wider. Programs work better when they see who gets left behind first. Counting by caste reveals hidden patterns in health, income, access. Some groups wait longer, get less, fall through cracks more often. Fair systems give extra support where history created deeper holes. Justice means adjusting help based on real conditions, not one-size rules. Start by lifting up those long ignored. Courts need to open wider, reach further, knowledge should travel fast among people everywhere. When elders suffer harm - beaten, robbed, or broken down with words - responses ought to hit hard enough to stop the next one before it begins. Help with law matters cannot wait, especially not for older souls crushed under caste

weight. Power shifts only when rules are known, used, felt on the ground. Start here - deep shifts in society need changes in how people think. When structures shift, beliefs can lag behind, held back by old habits like age bias, rigid class systems, or male dominance. These ideas stick because they are repeated daily, passed on without question. But awareness grows when schools teach fairness, when conversations open up in public spaces. Values written into constitutions mean little unless lived out loud. Think of Ambedkar's path: sharp thinking paired with grassroots energy, voices rising not to shout but to reclaim space. Justice for older lives asks exactly this mix - bold thought meeting steady action.

Conclusion

Older people pushed aside in today's India did not happen by chance. It happened because leaders ignored their duties under the law. Communities forgot how to care for one another. Society failed to live up to what Ambedkar taught - freedom, fairness, respect. Through his eyes, neglecting elders looks like the same old pattern seen by Dalits, tribals, women, others stripped of real belonging. Born into hardship should not mean living without worth. For older people across India, particularly those crushed by poverty and caste, this idea hits deep. Not being treated as equal because of where you start in life - those cuts sharp even now. Change means tearing down old hierarchies, the kind Ambedkar spent decades fighting. Respect must come through law, yes - but also through how we treat each other daily. A country truly honouring its elders builds systems that see their value, not overlook it. Dignity at the end cannot be reserved for some while denied to others. What matters grows clearer when fairness shapes policy instead of tradition. Justice for aging citizens ties back to principles long spoken but rarely lived. Real care shows up not just in words, but in who gets protected when weak. What honouring Ambedkar means today shows up when we carry his fight into every corner where unfairness lives - like the silent hardship faced by countless older people across Indian villages and urban homes, still waiting for the nation to see them.

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