



Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: A Review of His Struggle Against Caste Injustice and Legacy in Social and Constitutional Reform

Dilip Kumar Darjee

Assistant Registrar, IGNOU Regional Centre Gangtok, Tadong, Gangtok, Sikkim -737102, India
Email - dilipkumar1974@gmail.com

Abstract: Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's life and work constitute a monumental journey from systemic social exclusion to becoming the principal architect of India's democratic and constitutional framework. Born into the Mahar caste and subjected to the oppressive realities of untouchability, Ambedkar's early experiences with caste-based discrimination fuelled a lifelong resistance against social injustice. Through extraordinary academic achievement, political activism, and legal reform, he emerged as a pioneering figure committed to the principles of equality, liberty, and social justice. His leadership in drafting the Indian Constitution, his advocacy for Dalit rights, and his eventual conversion to Buddhism marked critical milestones in his mission for social emancipation and spiritual dignity.

This review article explores Ambedkar's multifaceted contributions ranging from intellectual scholarship to constitutional vision and spiritual transformation and also evaluates the broader social and political movements he inspired. It also assesses his enduring relevance in contemporary debates on equity, human rights, and global social reform. Drawing on historical and scholarly sources, the article offers a comprehensive analysis of Ambedkar's legacy as a thinker, reformer, and symbol of resistance whose influence continues to shape India and resonate across the world.

Key Words: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar; Caste Discrimination; Indian Constitution; Social Justice; Dalit Rights; Neo-Buddhism; Affirmative Action; Political Reform; Human Rights.

1. INTRODUCTION :

1.1 Background of the Study

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) remains one of the most transformative figures in modern Indian history. Born into the Mahar caste classified as “untouchable” within the hierarchical and oppressive caste system, Ambedkar's life trajectory epitomizes the struggle against entrenched social stratification, systemic marginalization, and the pursuit of equality through intellect, activism, and constitutional reform. His journey, marked by academic brilliance, legal acumen, and moral courage, transcended the socio-cultural limitations imposed on him by birth. Not only did he challenge the prevailing Brahmanical order that normalized untouchability and exclusion, but he also laid the foundation for a democratic, pluralistic, and inclusive Indian state through his pivotal role as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution (Constitution of India, n.d.). The intersection of Ambedkar's personal experiences of humiliation and social ostracization with his deep engagement in academic and political spheres offers a rich area for critical exploration. His multifaceted role as a scholar, social reformer, politician, lawmaker, and spiritual guide makes him a unique historical figure whose impact is still unfolding in contemporary India and beyond. Understanding Ambedkar's contributions is not merely a historical exercise but an essential endeavour in the ongoing fight for social justice, human rights, and constitutional morality.

1.2 Importance of Reviewing Ambedkar's Life and Philosophy

While Ambedkar has been widely commemorated in statues, memorials, academic institutions, and state honours including the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, his ideological legacy often suffers from reductive interpretations. A minute understanding of Ambedkar's ideas is particularly relevant in the present socio-political

context, where issues of caste-based discrimination, affirmative action, communalism, and democratic erosion are at the forefront of national and global discourse (Britannica, 2021).

Moreover, Ambedkar's philosophical interventions were not limited to caste; his writings and actions addressed a broad range of issues including labour rights, gender equality, federalism, economic justice, and religious freedom. His critique of Hindu orthodoxy, advocacy for women's rights, and engagement with Buddhism as a medium of liberation provide a holistic and forward-looking framework for inclusive governance and social transformation (Columbia Global Centers, n.d.). Thus, revisiting Ambedkar's life is not just an act of homage but a necessary scholarly inquiry into the blueprint of modern social reform movements.

2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to undertake a comprehensive review of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's life, work, and enduring legacy. The specific objectives include but not limited to the followings:

- Trace Ambedkar's early life experiences with untouchability and the socio-cultural oppression he faced during his formative years.
- Analyse his academic journey, both in India and abroad, as a strategy of resistance and empowerment through knowledge.
- Examine his political activism and organizational leadership in uplifting Dalits and securing constitutional safeguards for the marginalized.
- Assess his seminal role in drafting the Indian Constitution and institutionalizing social justice within the legal framework of the Republic country.
- Explore his later philosophical and spiritual shift through his conversion to Buddhism and the genesis of the Dalit Buddhist Movement.
- Evaluate his contemporary relevance in the spheres of law, policy, education, social movements, and human rights.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to synthesize historical accounts, scholarly interpretations, and contemporary evaluations to present a well-rounded understanding of Ambedkar's legacy. This scholarly review not only highlights his personal triumphs over systemic oppression but also contextualizes his intellectual contributions in shaping the principles of equity, liberty, and fraternity in modern India.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, historical-analytical methodology grounded in secondary source research to examine the multifaceted life and legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The review draws upon a comprehensive range of primary sources, including Ambedkar's speeches, writings, and legislative contributions, as compiled in the *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* series edited by Vasant Moon (Government of Maharashtra), as well as his independent works such as *Annihilation of Caste* and *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

In addition to primary sources, the study incorporates scholarly analyses, biographical accounts, historical commentaries, and peer-reviewed literature to contextualize Ambedkar's contributions within broader socio-political and legal frameworks. The sources include works by established scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot, Eleanor Zelliot, Gail Omvedt, and others engaged in Dalit studies, constitutional law, and Indian political thought.

The analytical framework is thematic and chronological, structured around key phases in Ambedkar's life; early social marginalization, academic excellence, political activism, constitutional authorship, religious conversion, and global legacy. These themes are interpreted through the lens of social justice theory, postcolonial critique, and Buddhist ethics, ensuring an interdisciplinary understanding of Ambedkar's enduring influence.

This review does not rely on fieldwork or quantitative data but aims to synthesize existing historiography and philosophical interpretations to present a holistic and critical assessment of Ambedkar's ideological and institutional legacy.

4. Early Life and the Burden of Untouchability

4.1 Socio-Historical Context of Caste and Untouchability in Colonial India

In order to understand the formative experiences of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, it is crucial to contextualize the deep-seated caste stratification that defined Indian society under both pre-colonial and colonial regimes. The Hindu varna system, later classified into the rigid caste (jati) hierarchy, created a deeply segregated social order. Those outside the four varnas designated as *Avarnas* or *untouchables* were subjected to systemic exclusion, often denied the right to access education, enter temples, use public water sources, or even living within the perimeters of the village (Dirks, 2001). The British colonial policies did little to dismantle this discriminatory framework. In fact, census classifications and administrative recognition of caste identities arguably reinforced its rigidity (Bayly, 1999). While the colonial state



introduced formal education and legal codification, these reforms were largely inaccessible to untouchable castes due to entrenched social prejudices. It was within this deeply hierarchical and exclusionary milieu that Ambedkar was born, and against which his life and work came to represent a fundamental rupture.

4.2 Birth and Family Background

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow, a cantonment town in present-day Madhya Pradesh, into a Marathi-speaking Dalit family of the Mahar caste classified at the time as untouchable. His father, Ramji Maloji Sakpal, served in the British Indian Army and had attained the rank of Subedar, a rare achievement for someone from a socially stigmatized community. Ramji emphasized discipline and education, laying the foundation for Ambedkar's intellectual pursuits (Keer, 1990). Despite his father's military background, the family remained subject to the caste-based humiliations and segregation that pervaded Indian society. Ambedkar's mother, Bhimabai, passed away when he was just five years old, adding emotional and psychological challenges to his early years. The family's repeated transfers due to military postings exposed young Ambedkar to varied manifestations of caste discrimination, which deeply shaped his understanding of the universality of untouchability in Indian society.

4.3 Early Encounters with Caste Discrimination

Ambedkar's school days provide vivid illustrations of the institutionalized discrimination against untouchables. Though he was enrolled in a government school in Satara and later Bombay (now Mumbai), the social environment was hostile. He was required to sit on a gunny sack which he had to carry himself, as he was not allowed to touch the classroom bench. Teachers often avoided interaction with him, and he was not permitted to drink water from the common tap; a peon, if available, had to pour water from a height to avoid "pollution" (Ambedkar, 1992). In one particularly dehumanizing incident narrated by Ambedkar himself, during a journey with his siblings to meet their father, they were denied access to water and transport because of their caste identity. It was only after hours of pleading that a cart driver reluctantly agreed to transport them, an act that deeply impacted Ambedkar's consciousness and made him acutely aware of the deep social fissures perpetuated by caste (Ambedkar, 1992).

4.4 Poverty, Emotional Strain, and Resilience

The intersection of poverty and caste-based marginalization created a doubly oppressive reality for the young Ambedkar. After his mother's death, the responsibility of care shifted among relatives, and he often lived in conditions of neglect and material deprivation. Despite these hardships, he showed an extraordinary commitment to learning. He read voraciously and excelled academically, drawing attention from teachers who, although prejudiced, could not ignore his brilliance (Jaffrelot, 2005). His early achievements, such as passing the matriculation examination in 1907 from Elphinstone High School, the first Mahar student to do so, were milestones not only in his life but also in the socio-political consciousness of the Dalit community. His success was celebrated by reformist leaders like Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, who later became one of Ambedkar's patrons. Education, thus, became both a personal liberation and a symbolic act of defiance against the systemic structures of exclusion.

4.5 Education as Early Resistance

Ambedkar's decision to pursue education was not merely aspirational but profoundly political. In a context where Dalits were routinely denied the right to read religious texts or receive formal instruction, his insistence on education was a radical departure. It challenged the ideological foundations of caste, which relied on denying knowledge and literacy to the oppressed classes. By advancing academically, Ambedkar invalidated the casteist narrative that equated purity with birth and superiority with ritual entitlement. His early writings and speeches underscore that for him, education was the "milk of a lioness", something that would empower the oppressed to claim their rights and dignity (Zelliot, 2005).

5. Breaking Caste Barriers through Academic Excellence and Intellectual Achievement

5.1 An Account of His Academic Journey

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's academic journey represents a powerful narrative of intellectual resistance and transformation. He began his formal education in colonial India under severe caste-based discrimination, completing his matriculation in 1907 from Elphinstone High School, becoming the first Mahar to do so, a historic milestone in Dalit educational history (Keer, 1990). He then enrolled at Elphinstone College, affiliated with the University of Bombay, where he earned a B.A. in Economics and Political Science in 1912, defying deeply entrenched caste barriers (Zelliot, 2005). Recognizing his academic promise, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda awarded him a scholarship that enabled him to study abroad, an opportunity that marked the beginning of a prolific international academic career.

Ambedkar joined Columbia University in 1913 and completed his M.A. in Economics in 1915 with a thesis titled *Ancient Indian Commerce*, which critically examined India's pre-colonial economic systems (Keer, 1990). He followed this with

another research thesis, *National Dividend of India – A Historic and Analytical Study*, in 1916, further showcasing his expertise in applied economics (Jaffrelo, 2005). That same year, he presented a seminal paper titled *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* at an anthropology seminar led by Professor Alexander Goldenweiser, his first scholarly engagement with caste theory in an academic setting (Zelliot, 2005).

Later in 1916, Ambedkar moved to the United Kingdom and enrolled at the London School of Economics (LSE) for a Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) in Economics, while also joining Gray's Inn to pursue legal training as a Barrister-at-Law. However, due to the premature termination of his Baroda State Scholarship, he returned to India in 1917 before completing either program. Upon his return, he took up a position as Professor of Political Economy at Sydenham College, becoming the first Indian to teach economics at a Bombay college (Moon, 1989). Despite financial difficulties, he continued writing and remained active in social reform.

In 1920, with support from private donors and royalties from his published work, Ambedkar returned to London. He submitted his thesis *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution* to LSE in 1921, a critical analysis of British monetary policy in India that anticipated many features of modern central banking. In 1923, he was awarded the D.Sc. in Economics, one of LSE's highest academic honors (Jaffrelo, 2005). That same year, he also completed his law studies and qualified as a Barrister-at-Law from Gray's Inn, gaining eligibility to practice law in Indian courts.

His academic achievements culminated in 1927, when Columbia University conferred upon him a Ph.D. in Economics, based on the thesis he had submitted a decade earlier. That same year, he returned to India with multiple prestigious degrees and qualifications in economics, law, and political science, making him one of the most highly educated Indians of his era. In later years, in recognition of his scholarly and legal contributions, Osmania University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) in 1953 (Bhattacharya, 2005). These academic milestones not only attest to Ambedkar's exceptional intellect but also laid the groundwork for his transformative efforts in the realms of constitutional democracy, anti-caste social reform, and human rights advocacy.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Educational Journey

Sr.	Year	Educational Assignment	College/University	Academic Work / Notes
1	1907	Matriculation (High School)	Elphinstone High School, Bombay	
2	1909	Intermediary (F.A.)	Elphinstone College, Bombay	
3	1912	B.A. in Economics & Political Science	University of Bombay (Elphinstone College)	
4	1913-15	M.A. in Economics	Columbia University, New York, USA	Thesis: <i>Ancient Indian Commerce</i>
5	1916	M.A. in Economics (Continued graduate research)	Columbia University, New York, USA	Second Thesis: <i>National Dividend of India – A Historic and Analytical Study</i> (unpublished)
6	1916 (May)	Presented a Seminar paper	Columbia University, New York, USA	Title : <i>Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development</i>
7	1916-17	Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) in Economics	London School of Economics (LSE), UK	Simultaneously joined Gray's Inn for Bar-at-Law training
8	1916-17	Barrister-at-Law	Gray's Inn, London, UK	
9	1917	Ph.D. in Economics (Thesis submitted)	Columbia University, New York, USA	Award of degree delayed due to administrative and wartime factors
Scholarship ended and returned to India in July 1917				
10	1918–1920	Professor of Political Economy	Sydenham College, Bombay	First Indian to teach economics
Returned to London and resumed studies at LSE and Gray's Inn in 1920				
11	1920-21	D.Sc. in Economics	London School of Economics (LSE), UK	Submitted thesis: <i>The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution</i>
12	1923	Awarded D.Sc. in Economics	London School of Economics (LSE), UK	One of the highest academic degrees of the institution
13	1923	Qualified as Barrister-at-Law	Gray's Inn, London, UK	Qualified as a barrister to practice in the Indian courts
14	1927	Ph.D. in Economics formally conferred	Columbia University, New York, USA	Degree awarded based on thesis submitted earlier in the year 1917
Upon completion of studies, returned to India in 1927				



15	1953	Honorary Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.)	Osmania University, Hyderabad	Honorary Degree
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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's pursuit of higher education was significantly enabled by the Baroda State Scholarship, awarded by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, which facilitated his studies abroad from 1913 to 1917 (Keer, 1990).

The academic journey of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar represents a revolutionary narrative of intellectual defiance against entrenched social hierarchies. It is not only a testimony to personal brilliance but also a broader symbol of resistance to caste-based epistemic exclusion. From being a boy denied the right to touch the classroom bench to becoming one of the most highly educated Indians of his time, Ambedkar's scholarly life was characterized by exceptional achievements, rigorous thought, and a transformative vision for society.

5.2 Columbia University: The Foundations of Democratic and Liberal Thought

In 1913, Ambedkar enrolled at Columbia University in New York, where he pursued M.A. in Economics. Under the mentorship of renowned scholars such as John Dewey and Edwin R. A. Seligman, Ambedkar immersed himself in liberal democratic theory, political economy, philosophy, and public administration (Jaffrelot, 2005). Dewey's pragmatism and emphasis on social ethics had a profound influence on Ambedkar's thinking, particularly regarding education as a tool for social transformation (Moon, 2000). His master's thesis, titled *Ancient Indian Commerce* (1915), explored trade, commerce, and economic history in ancient India, challenging orientalist assumptions that India's economy was stagnant and ahistorical. He followed it up with another thesis, *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* (1916), earning his second M.A. degree. His doctoral dissertation for the Ph.D. at Columbia, *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*, was a detailed examination of Indian currency and monetary policy, later published by the Indian government (Ambedkar, 1923/2012). It showcased his economic foresight, as he argued against the Gold Exchange Standard and proposed an autonomous monetary policy for India.

Ambedkar's Columbia years were intellectually transformative. It was here that he cultivated his deep appreciation for democracy, individual rights, and constitutionalism, principles that would later shape the Indian Constitution.

5.3 London School of Economics and Legal Training at Gray's Inn

After completing his studies at Columbia, Ambedkar moved to London in 1916 to study at the London School of Economics (LSE) and get trained in law at Gray's Inn. However, financial difficulties forced him to return to India in 1917 before completing these programs. Despite this interruption, he returned to London in 1920 and resumed his academic pursuits, demonstrating immense perseverance. At LSE, he wrote a second doctoral thesis, *The Problem of the Indian Rupee*, further refining his economic critique of British monetary policy in India. He also earned a D.Sc. (Economics) in 1923, making him one of the few Indians to achieve this distinction at the time. Simultaneously, he completed his legal studies at Gray's Inn and qualified as a barrister, equipping himself with the legal tools to fight institutional injustice (Zelliot, 2005). His training at these elite institutions endowed him with a rare combination of interdisciplinary knowledge like law, economics, political science, and philosophy that made him a formidable public intellectual and policymaker.

5.4 Intellectual Contributions to the Study of Caste, Economy, and Social Justice

Ambedkar's scholarly output was prolific and path-breaking. One of his most significant theoretical contributions was the formulation of caste as a system of social exclusion rooted in religious ideology and economic deprivation. In his seminal work *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Ambedkar directly challenged orthodox Hindu interpretations and critiqued caste not merely as a social hierarchy but as a deeply entrenched ideology sustained by religious texts and Brahminical authority. His text *'Who Were the Shudras?'* (1946) provided a historical-materialist account of caste formation, arguing that caste was a later sociopolitical construct and not a divine order. In *'The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?'* (1948), he traced the roots of untouchability to social dynamics rather than spiritual impurity, undermining centuries-old justifications for caste discrimination. In economics, his early works anticipated many ideas later taken up by development economists. He advocated for industrialization, public investment in infrastructure, and redistribution policies to correct historical injustices. His doctoral and postdoctoral research critiqued the exploitative monetary and fiscal systems of colonial rule, calling for a sovereign central bank, equitable taxation, and fiscal federalism, many of which were adopted post-independence.

5.5 Education as a Revolutionary Tool

Throughout his life, Ambedkar saw education as a revolutionary tool for emancipation. He famously stated, "Educate, agitate, organize," placing education at the centre of his call for social transformation. For Ambedkar, literacy was not merely about acquiring knowledge but about reclaiming dignity and equality (Zelliot, 2005). He founded several

educational institutions, including the People's Education Society (1945), which went on to establish colleges in Mumbai and elsewhere. His commitment to academic excellence, both personally and institutionally, helped lay the intellectual foundations of modern India.

6. Political Engagement and Drafting of the Constitution

The political life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was deeply intertwined with his mission for social justice, equality, and the annihilation of caste. His political activism was not a detour from his academic life but a logical extension of it. Ambedkar believed that structural reforms could only be achieved through legal and constitutional mechanisms backed by state power. His commitment to democratic constitutionalism and egalitarian politics not only shaped the trajectory of Dalit politics but also laid the foundational ethos of the Indian Republic.

6.1 Initial Political Activism and Formation of Independent Labour Party

Ambedkar's foray into political engagement began in the 1920s, as he began organizing the depressed classes to demand social and political rights. His 1927 public burning of the *Manusmriti*, a Hindu scriptural text that legitimized caste oppression was a radical act that marked his symbolic and ideological break with Brahminical Hinduism (Zelliot, 2005). In 1936, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP), a political outfit designed to challenge both caste-based and class-based exploitation. Unlike traditional Congress leaders who viewed the freedom struggle as the sole national priority, Ambedkar insisted on addressing the internal hierarchies within Indian society, particularly untouchability and landlessness (Jaffrelot, 2005). The ILP contested the 1937 Bombay Provincial elections and won 15 seats, proving Ambedkar's growing mass support among Dalit and working-class voters. The ILP's manifesto emphasized labour rights, land reforms, and state ownership of key industries. Ambedkar's political strategy during this phase attempted to build an alliance between the Dalits and the working class, reflecting his nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of caste and class.

6.2 Poona Pact and Representation Debates

A critical episode in Ambedkar's political career was the 1932 Communal Award and the subsequent Poona Pact. The British government, under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, had granted separate electorates to the Depressed Classes under the Communal Award. While Ambedkar supported this as a means of ensuring political autonomy and representation for Dalits, Mahatma Gandhi opposed it, arguing that it would divide Hindu society. Gandhi undertook a fast unto death in Yerwada Jail, which led to immense public pressure on Ambedkar to rescind the demand. The result was the Poona Pact (1932), where Ambedkar agreed to reserved seats for the Depressed Classes within the Hindu electorate, instead of separate electorates (Ambedkar, 1945/2014). Though the Pact ensured a higher number of reserved seats, Ambedkar later regretted it, stating that it compromised the political independence of Dalits (Keer, 1990). This event marked a shift in Ambedkar's political strategy from working within the Hindu fold to increasingly distancing himself from it. It also emphasized his unwavering commitment to securing institutional safeguards for Dalits in all political arrangements.

6.3 Political Vision: Founding of Scheduled Castes Federation

In 1942, Ambedkar dissolved the ILP and founded the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF), with the aim of creating a nationwide platform for Dalit political assertion. Unlike the ILP, which had broader class-based objectives, the SCF focused specifically on the upliftment and representation of Scheduled Castes in Indian polity. However, the SCF struggled to gain mass traction at the national level, largely due to the dominance of the Indian National Congress in the freedom movement. Despite these limitations, Ambedkar continued to be a powerful voice for the Depressed Classes at various government and constitutional forums (Zelliot, 2005).

6.4 Role in the Constituent Assembly and Drafting Committee

Perhaps the most historic aspect of Ambedkar's political life was his role in the making of the Indian Constitution. After India's independence in 1947, he was appointed as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, a position he used to institutionalize the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice into the very structure of the Republic (Austin, 2003). Ambedkar's constitutional vision was inclusive and transformative. Drawing from his study of Western liberal democracies and his own experiences of exclusion, he crafted a constitution that sought to protect individual freedoms while mandating affirmative action for historically marginalized groups. He was instrumental in introducing provisions related to:

- a) Fundamental Rights (Articles 12–35), particularly the right to equality (Article 14), abolition of untouchability (Article 17), and protection against discrimination (Article 15).
- b) Directive Principles of State Policy, which aimed at building a welfare state.

- c) Reservations in education, employment, and political representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under Articles 330, 332, and 335.
- d) The abolition of untouchability and affirmative action provisions, which institutionalized a framework for social justice.

Ambedkar famously declared the Indian Constitution as a document of “social revolution,” and asserted that “we are going to enter a life of contradictions” warning that political democracy must be matched by social and economic democracy (Ambedkar, 1949/2014).

6.5 Ministerial Tenure and Resignation on Hindu Code Bill

Post-independence, Ambedkar served as the Law Minister in the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s cabinet from 1947 to 1951. During this time, he focused on legal reforms that aligned with constitutional morality. His most ambitious legislative initiative was the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to modernize and codify Hindu personal laws, particularly in the realm of marriage, inheritance, and women’s rights (Jaffrelot, 2005). The bill proposed to ensure gender equality in Hindu society by granting women rights in property and inheritance. However, it faced intense opposition from conservative sections, both within and outside the Congress party. When the bill was stalled and diluted, Ambedkar resigned from his ministerial post in 1951 as a mark of protest. His resignation speech remains one of the most scathing critiques of Indian political timidity in the face of conservative backlash.

6.6 Vision of an Inclusive Polity and Democratic Socialism

Ambedkar’s political engagement extended beyond mere representation of Dalits; it reflected his broader vision of democratic socialism, economic justice, and moral governance. He envisioned a state that was both legally empowered and morally accountable. In his writings and speeches, he warned against the “grammar of anarchy” and advocated for a constitutional path to social change. His idea of “constitutional morality,” borrowed from British political traditions, emphasized restraint, dialogue, and adherence to democratic values over populist or majoritarian impulses (Austin, 2003). He repeatedly cautioned against hero worship in politics, arguing that a democratic society must rely on institutions, not individuals.

7. Contemporary Relevance in Law, Policy, Education, Social Movements, and Human Rights

The enduring relevance of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in contemporary India and the global discourse on human rights is profound and multifaceted. His ideas, once considered radical, have now become foundational to policies aimed at addressing historical injustices and building a socially just and inclusive society. The constitutional mechanisms he pioneered continue to guide legal reforms, influence educational policy, inspire social movements, and shape international perspectives on inequality and systemic discrimination.

7.1 Legal and Policy Frameworks

Ambedkar’s legal vision remains embedded in India’s constitutional framework, especially in provisions related to affirmative action, social justice, and protection against discrimination. The reservation system, instituted through Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 335 of the Indian Constitution, continues to serve as the cornerstone of state policy for empowering Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Contemporary legal debates such as those around the reservation in promotions (e.g., *Jarnail Singh v. Lachhmi Narain Gupta*, 2018), EWS quota (2019), and Hon’ble Supreme Court judgments on atrocities against Dalits under the SC/ST Act (1989) are situated within the framework that Ambedkar conceptualized (Jaffrelot, 2005). Moreover, his concept of constitutional morality, the idea that citizens and institutions must uphold the spirit and values of the Constitution, has become increasingly relevant in a period marked by rising communalism and populism. The Supreme Court of India has invoked this concept in landmark judgments, such as *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) and *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala* (2018), thereby reiterating Ambedkar’s emphasis on ethical governance and rights-based jurisprudence (Chatterjee, 2021).

7.2 Education and Knowledge Empowerment

Ambedkar viewed education as the primary tool of liberation, famously declaring, “*Educate, Agitate, Organize.*” His emphasis on universal and inclusive education continues to shape India’s education policy. Affirmative action in higher education, including reservations in universities and national scholarship schemes, directly stems from Ambedkar’s advocacy for dismantling Brahmanical control over knowledge production (Deshpande, 2017). The creation of institutions such as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ambedkar Chairs in various universities, and the integration of Ambedkar’s thought into syllabi across disciplines has institutionalized his intellectual legacy. However, ongoing challenges such as caste-based discrimination in campuses, unequal access to resources, and dropout rates



among SC/ST students reveal the gaps between policy and practice, affirming the continued relevance of Ambedkar's educational vision (Teltumbde, 2018).

7.3 Social Movements and Political Mobilization

Ambedkarite movements have continued to flourish in post-independence India, particularly through Dalit rights organizations, student unions, women's collectives, and labour movements. The movements like the Dalit Panthers (1972), Ambedkar Students' Association, and more recently, the Bhima-Koregaon commemorations, are rooted in Ambedkar's thought and express resistance against caste-based violence and state apathy (Omvedt, 2004). Furthermore, Ambedkar's legacy informs anti-caste feminist discourses, especially in addressing intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women. Groups such as the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) and academic initiatives like the Ambedkarite Feminist Movement have reclaimed Ambedkar's vision of social justice by placing gender at the center of caste debates.

7.4 Human Rights and Global Discourse

Ambedkar's ideas have permeated global human rights discourses. International organizations like the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International have recognized caste-based discrimination as a human rights violation, aligning with Ambedkar's framing of caste as a form of graded inequality and moral violence (Rutherford, 2010). His thought also finds resonance in global movements that address systemic oppression, such as Black Lives Matter, Indigenous rights, and anti-apartheid activism, because of his holistic emphasis on dignity, recognition, and representation. Scholars and activists from the Global South increasingly invoke Ambedkar alongside thinkers like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Frantz Fanon, viewing his work as a powerful blueprint for emancipatory politics (Queen, 1996).

8. Conversion to Buddhism and Social Emancipation

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 marked the culmination of his lifelong struggle for social justice, equality, and spiritual liberation. For Ambedkar, religion was not merely a personal belief system but a social institution capable of transforming the moral and ethical foundations of society. His embrace of Buddhism was both a rejection of the caste-bound structures of Hinduism and a proactive step toward constructing a new ethical and emancipatory community for the marginalized. This historic act has had profound implications for Dalit identity, socio-political movements, and the reconfiguration of religious and cultural narratives in India.

8.1 Disillusionment with Hinduism and Search for an Ethical Religion

Ambedkar's disillusionment with Hinduism was rooted in his lifelong experience of systemic caste discrimination and his extensive critique of Hindu scriptures. As early as 1935, he declared publicly: "*I was born a Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu*" (Keer, 1990). This announcement was a moral indictment of a religion that legitimized social hierarchy and ritual pollution through texts such as *Manusmriti* and *Dharmaśāstra* (Ambedkar, 1946/2014). For Ambedkar, Hinduism lacked the ethical foundation for social equality and was irredeemably tied to the varna system. He maintained that Hindu reform was insufficient and advocated for complete social and religious rupture. His search for a religion that upheld liberty, equality, and fraternity led him to explore Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism. After extensive comparative study and dialogue with religious leaders and scholars, he found in Buddhism a rational, moral, and socially egalitarian tradition that resonated with his philosophical and political values (Jaffrelot, 2005).

8.2 Embrace of Navayana Buddhism: A Radical Reinterpretation

Ambedkar's eventual choice was not to adopt traditional Theravāda or Mahāyāna Buddhism in toto but to reinterpret Buddhism in a modern, socially engaged form, now called Navayāna (the "New Vehicle"). In his seminal work '*The Buddha and His Dhamma*' (1957), Ambedkar rejected metaphysical doctrines such as karma, rebirth, and nirvana as fatalistic and inconsistent with rationalism and social justice (Ambedkar, 1957/2014). Instead, he re-articulated Buddhism as a practical ethical system centered on *Dhamma*, a moral law based on compassion, equality, and social responsibility. Navayāna Buddhism rejected both Hindu theology and Brahminical dominance, positioning itself as an emancipatory creed for the oppressed. It emphasized ethical living, rational inquiry, and collective upliftment over ritualism and renunciation.

8.3 The Historic Deeksha Ceremony of 1956

On 14 October 1956, in Nagpur, Ambedkar led a mass conversion of approximately half a million Dalits in a ceremony known as the Deeksha Bhoomi, formally renouncing Hinduism and accepting the *Three Jewels* (Triratna) and *Five Precepts* (Pañcāśīla) of Buddhism. In this ceremony, he administered 22 vows to his followers, which explicitly

denounced Hindu gods, scriptures, and caste-based practices, while affirming loyalty to Buddhist principles (Zelliot, 2005). This act was not just a religious event but a profound socio-political declaration. It signalled a collective rejection of caste slavery and a conscious embrace of dignity, agency, and equality. The mass conversion galvanized the Dalit movement and redefined the spiritual landscape of India by introducing a new religious-political identity.

8.4 Buddhism as a Path to Social Emancipation

Ambedkar viewed Buddhism not only as a personal refuge but also as a social philosophy of liberation. For him, *Dhamma* was synonymous with righteousness and justice. He emphasized that the Buddha was a revolutionary figure who critiqued inequality and challenged the social orthodoxy of his time (Ambedkar, 1957/2014). By reviving Buddhism as a tool for emancipation, Ambedkar provided a spiritual foundation for the Dalit struggle. The moral teachings of Buddhism like non-violence, right livelihood, and social harmony, were adapted to promote dignity, self-respect, and community empowerment. This transformation enabled Dalits to recast their identity from victims of oppression to agents of change. The scholars like Christopher Queen (1996) have classified Ambedkar's movement as part of Engaged Buddhism, where religious practice is linked to activism and social transformation. His version of Buddhism rejected passivity and metaphysical escapism, instead promoting active resistance against injustice.

8.5 Socio-Political Impact of the Conversion Movement

Ambedkar's conversion had far-reaching consequences. It inaugurated a new religious community, i.e., Neo-Buddhists, primarily composed of Dalits, especially Mahars from Maharashtra. Post-conversion, Dalits began to assert their identity not only through political organizations but also through cultural and religious practices, including Buddhist festivals, literature, and iconography (Teltumbde, 2010). The movement laid the groundwork for Dalit Buddhism, a distinct cultural and spiritual tradition that emphasized social ethics, modern education, and anti-caste consciousness. It influenced generations of Dalit thinkers, writers, and activists and offered an alternative imagination of Indian society that was inclusive and democratic. The conversion also altered India's religious demography and questioned the monopoly of upper-caste Hindus over spiritual authority. Despite state indifference and limited institutional support, Ambedkarite Buddhism has continued to grow, especially in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.

8.6 Final Reflections and Legacy

Ambedkar died on 6 December 1956, barely two months after his historic conversion. Yet, in those final weeks, he completed '*The Buddha and His Dhamma*', a magisterial synthesis of Buddhist teachings and modern social thought. His legacy has inspired thousands to continue the fight for equality through the dual path of political assertion and spiritual awakening. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was not a retreat into religiosity but an affirmation of rational, ethical, and egalitarian humanism. His interpretation of Buddhism continues to shape contemporary discourses on social justice, religious reform, and identity politics in India.

9. Enduring Legacy and Global Impact

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's influence transcends national boundaries, with his contributions to social justice, human rights, and constitutionalism continuing to resonate on the global stage. While his life and work were rooted in the specific socio-political context of colonial India, his vision for equality, liberty, and fraternity has inspired movements worldwide. Ambedkar's intellectual legacy has played a crucial role in reshaping the discourse on caste, democracy, and human rights, both in India and abroad.

9.1 Ambedkar's Influence on Indian Democracy and Constitutionalism

Ambedkar's most enduring contribution is his pivotal role in shaping the Indian Constitution, which remains the bedrock of India's democratic system. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar ensured the legal enshrinement of fundamental rights that directly challenged the caste-based discrimination entrenched in colonial and pre-colonial India. His intellectual approach to constitutionalism sought to create a framework that would guarantee equality before the law, justice, and protection for marginalized communities (Ambedkar, 1947/2014). His advocacy for affirmative action, encapsulated in provisions for reservations (affirmative action) for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, marked a revolutionary step in social justice, aimed at dismantling the centuries-old social hierarchies. The abolition of untouchability (Article 17) and the promotion of social and economic rights for the oppressed remain direct outcomes of Ambedkar's vision for a just society (Zelliot, 2005). Furthermore, Ambedkar's insistence on a secular state and his commitment to safeguarding minority rights have ensured that the Indian democracy remains a pluralistic society where individual dignity is respected across different religious, cultural, and social lines (Jaffrelot, 2005).

9.2 Global Impact and Legacy in Social Justice Movements

Beyond India, Ambedkar's ideas have found resonance in various global struggles for human rights and social justice. His thoughts on equality, liberty, and the abolition of oppressive social structures have inspired not only Dalit movements but also other marginalized communities facing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and religion. For example, Ambedkar's work influenced civil rights movements in the United States, particularly the African American struggle for equality during the 20th century (Rutherford, 2010). Ambedkar's focus on social emancipation through education, social mobility, and political participation has influenced global civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who emphasized the importance of non-violent struggle for social change. Ambedkar's emphasis on rationality and the need for a reformed society has contributed to global discourses on secularism and human rights, especially concerning the rights of religious minorities and socially excluded groups (Jaffrelot, 2005).

9.3 Influence on Dalit and Post-colonial Movements

Ambedkar's legacy has had a profound impact on Dalit empowerment movements both in India and abroad. In India, Ambedkar is regarded as the symbolic father of Dalit liberation, and his teachings continue to guide political and social organizations like the Republican Party of India and Bharip Bahujan Mahasangh (Ambedkar, 1946/2014). His thoughts on caste, its abolition, and the fight against untouchability serve as the guiding principles for Dalit-led political activism. Outside India, Ambedkar's teachings have reverberated in post-colonial societies, particularly in countries with complex caste-like social stratifications such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and even African nations facing racial discrimination. In Nepal, Ambedkar's ideas influenced the Dalit and Indigenous Rights Movement, which has led to significant policy changes regarding the political participation and rights of marginalized groups (Gaije, 2013). The focus on education, political empowerment, and the collective assertion of identity is central to many contemporary social justice campaigns in these countries, drawing heavily on Ambedkar's intellectual and political framework.

9.4 The Neo-Buddhist Movement: Ambedkar's Global Religious Legacy

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism and his subsequent reinterpretation of the religion in a socially engaged context has created a new global movement. His Neo-Buddhism, or Navayana, is a revolutionary blend of traditional Buddhist teachings and modern social justice ideals, focusing on equality, rationality, and social reform. The global appeal of Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism has attracted followers not only in India but also in the global South and the Western world (King, 2005). The establishment of Ambedkarite Buddhist institutions, memorials, and educational programs around the world has continued to expand the reach of his ideas. In the United States and Europe, where issues of race, caste, and marginalization persist, Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhism has inspired movements that challenge both religious dogma and social exclusion. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism has become a point of convergence for those advocating for religious pluralism, human rights, and the abolition of discrimination. Notably, the Dalit Buddhist movement has spread to various countries with large populations of people who have historically been oppressed, including Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar (Dutta, 2013).

9.5 Ambedkar's Impact on Education and Intellectual Thought

Ambedkar's advocacy for education as a means of social transformation remains one of the most enduring aspects of his legacy. He believed that education was the key to dismantling caste-based oppression and promoted educational reforms that focused on uplifting the marginalized. Ambedkar's legacy in this regard has been instrumental in shaping education policies for Dalits and backward classes in India, such as the establishment of universities and scholarships specifically aimed at these groups (Ambedkar, 1947/2014). Globally, Ambedkar's intellectual work on the caste system, social justice, and constitutional law continues to influence academic research in social sciences, law, political science, and religious studies. His critique of the caste system has led to a rethinking of social stratification theories, and his work on law and democracy has been integrated into global discourses on justice (Deshpande, 2017).

9.6 Ambedkar's Global Recognition and Honors

Ambedkar's contributions to social justice have earned him recognition on the international stage. He has been posthumously honoured with India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna, and his birthday, 14 April, is celebrated annually as Ambedkar Jayanti, a national day of remembrance and reflection on his principles. Globally, Ambedkar's impact has been recognized through the establishment of statues, memorials, and academic institutions in his name. For instance, in the United States, universities such as Columbia University and Harvard Law School have recognized Ambedkar's intellectual legacy, and statues of Ambedkar stand in London and New York City, emphasizing his importance as a global icon for human rights and equality (Keer, 1990). Ambedkar's ideas on equality, democracy, and human rights have garnered international acclaim, positioning him as a significant figure in global struggles against oppression and discrimination.

9.7 Ambedkar's Lasting Legacy

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy, both within India and globally, continues to be a vital force for social change. His intellectual contributions in the fields of constitutional law, social justice, and human rights remain foundational in the modern discourse on equality. His leadership in shaping India's democratic ideals, his tireless advocacy for the Dalit community, and his revolutionary reinterpretation of Buddhism have left an indelible mark on the global struggle for social justice. Ambedkar's work reminds us that the fight for equality and human dignity is continuous and ever-evolving. His legacy continues to inspire generations of activists, intellectuals, and marginalized communities across the globe who draw upon his vision to confront contemporary challenges related to caste, race, and inequality. As long as these struggles persist, the teachings and ideals of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar will remain an enduring beacon of hope and a guide for those committed to building a more just and equitable world.

10. Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life and work continue to serve as a beacon of hope and transformation, not only within India but globally. His intellectual legacy, grounded in a relentless pursuit of justice, equality, and human rights, has left an indelible mark on multiple facets of modern society. Ambedkar's contributions have reshaped the discourse on caste, social justice, and democratic governance, influencing not only the policies of a post-colonial India but also movements for human rights and social liberation across the globe. The conclusion of his journey, while marking his departure, has simultaneously marked the beginning of a broader global awakening to issues of caste-based discrimination, social exclusion, and the fight for equality.

10.1 Ambedkar's Vision of a Just Society

Dr. Ambedkar's vision was deeply rooted in the principles of equality, justice, and liberty. He sought to create a society where caste, class, and social hierarchy would no longer determine the worth of an individual. His contributions to the Indian Constitution and the drafting of laws that recognized and protected the rights of marginalized communities laid a firm foundation for democratic governance in India. Ambedkar's conception of justice was not merely legalistic; it was deeply social and moral. For him, justice entailed the removal of all forms of discrimination, especially caste-based oppression, and the creation of a society based on dignity and equality (Ambedkar, 1947/2014). His most significant achievement in this regard was the abolition of untouchability through constitutional means, which stands as a monumental achievement in Indian democracy (Jaffrelot, 2005). Beyond legislation, Ambedkar envisioned a transformation in the social fabric of India, one that would respect the intrinsic human dignity of all individuals, irrespective of their caste, religion, or social status. His relentless campaign for social rights and his efforts to ensure affirmative action for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes represent his commitment to social justice as a vehicle for true national progress (Ambedkar, 1947/2014).

10.2 The Continuing Relevance of Ambedkar's Ideas

Although Dr. Ambedkar passed away over six decades ago, his ideas remain incredibly relevant to contemporary struggles for justice. In India, while there has been significant progress in the legal framework aimed at reducing caste-based discrimination, the social fabric of the country still grapples with deep-rooted caste-based inequalities. Ambedkar's advocacy for affirmative action, education, and social empowerment continues to be a crucial aspect of contemporary political and social debates on the rights of Dalits and backward communities (Deshpande, 2017). His theory of caste and his analysis of caste-based exploitation still serve as key tools for understanding the complexities of social stratification in India and beyond. Globally, Ambedkar's impact on social justice movements continues to grow. His ideas on equality and human dignity have found fertile ground in civil rights movements in countries such as the United States, where his work has been influential in the struggle for racial equality. His Neo-Buddhism philosophy, which integrates social justice with religious reformation, has also gained recognition worldwide as a potent force for social transformation (King, 2005).

10.3 Global Legacy in Caste, Race, and Human Rights

One of the enduring aspects of Ambedkar's legacy is his ability to transcend national borders and contribute meaningfully to global discourses on human rights. His work inspired not only Dalit liberation movements in India but also anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and civil rights movements in the United States. Ambedkar's emphasis on social emancipation, equal opportunities, and the right to live with dignity continues to resonate with marginalized groups worldwide (Rutherford, 2010). In countries with historical caste-like systems such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and even in the United States, Ambedkar's work continues to influence the political and social struggles of marginalized communities. His advocacy for the abolition of untouchability and caste-based discrimination has contributed to the growing recognition of caste as a form of social exclusion that deserves to be addressed in global human rights

frameworks (Jaffrelot, 2005). Ambedkar's global legacy also extends to his influence on Buddhist reform movements. His reinterpretation of Buddhism, through his Neo-Buddhism, was a direct challenge to the caste-based exclusion prevalent in Hinduism, offering marginalized communities an alternative spiritual path. This has led to the establishment of Buddhist communities committed to social justice and human rights, both in India and globally, especially in the global South (Dutta, 2013).

10.4 Ambedkar's Enduring Inspiration for Future Generations

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy is not one of mere historical significance, but one that continues to inspire future generations in their ongoing struggle for social justice, equality, and human rights. His life and work demonstrate that one can effectively confront systemic oppression through intellectual rigor, political engagement, and spiritual transformation. Ambedkar's principles serve as a model for those seeking to challenge discrimination in any form, and his teachings inspire the young to advocate for education, empowerment, and inclusivity in both local and global contexts. Ambedkar's struggle for the rights of Dalits and marginalized groups can serve as a source of inspiration for activists and political leaders around the world who aim to create inclusive societies where people of all races, castes, and religions are given equal opportunities. His commitment to non-violence and education provides a framework for dealing with social and economic inequalities in a peaceful, thoughtful manner. Through his example, Ambedkar teaches that social transformation begins with self-awareness, knowledge, and a resolute commitment to equality.

10.5 The Lasting Impact of Ambedkar's Vision

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of a just and egalitarian society, free from the shackles of caste, inequality, and oppression, continues to shape global discourses on social justice and human rights. His life's work has not only altered the course of Indian history but has provided invaluable insights into the nature of social change, the role of education, and the power of legal frameworks in ensuring social justice. His contributions to constitutional law, human rights, and religious reform remain foundational to the fight for equality and continue to influence generations of activists, scholars, and policymakers.

Ambedkar's intellectual and political journey serves as a reminder that social transformation requires persistent struggle, intellectual engagement, and moral courage. His enduring legacy lies in his unwavering belief in the power of the individual and the collective to create a more just and compassionate world. As long as there are struggles for equality, liberty, and justice, Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and actions will continue to serve as a guiding light, shaping the future for those who seek a world free from oppression.

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