

Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal

(International Open Access, Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal)

(Multidisciplinary, Monthly, Multilanguage)

* Vol-1* *Issue-5* *December 2024*

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Political Concept of Social Justice

Dr. Vishavjeet Singh

Assistant Professor, Political Science, DAV College Pundri, Kaithal

Abstract

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's political philosophy is fundamentally rooted in the principles of social justice, equality, liberty, and human dignity. This study examines Ambedkar's concept of social justice and its significance in addressing social, political, and economic inequalities in Indian society. Ambedkar viewed caste-based discrimination and untouchability as major obstacles to democracy and human development. He advocated a social order based on equality, fraternity, and constitutional morality, emphasizing the protection of civil rights, legal safeguards, and political representation for marginalized communities. The paper explores Ambedkar's views on equality and dignity, civil rights, economic justice, democratic participation, and institutional reforms. It also highlights his contributions to the framing of the Constitution of India and his efforts to secure social and political rights for Scheduled Castes and other disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the study discusses Ambedkar's policy ideas concerning education, labor welfare, land reforms, and the eradication of caste-based practices. His vision of democracy extended beyond political equality to include social and economic justice as essential conditions for a just society. The paper concludes that Ambedkar's ideas remain highly relevant in contemporary times, providing valuable guidance for addressing inequality, discrimination, and emerging forms of social exclusion while promoting an inclusive and democratic social order.

Keywords- Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Social Justice, Equality and Dignity, Caste System, Democracy, Civil Rights, Constitutionalism.

1. Introduction to social justice

Social Justice in the sense of fairness and justice in the relations between the individual and society is the essence of Ambedkar's political philosophy. Various definitions of social justice lead to three broad conclusions. Social justice aims at the establishment of a society free from inequalities based on caste, creed, race, gender, power, wealth, etc.

Social justice has different political aspects. Political justice treats the allocation of opportunities. Without equality in politics, other forms of inequality crowd in and distort the parts of the system that have no obvious injustice in them. Ambedkar emphasized legal and civil rights that includes the rule of Law and due process and protection of fundamental rights. Garrard's Principle of Protection recognizes, in particular, that certain people have the right to certain basic things by virtue of their minority position,

and if these rights are denied to or taken from them, they are oppressed. Caste is a social stratification system that divides people into unequal hierarchical groups. The Brahmins, the elites of totalitarianism today are overwhelmingly Brahmins. Ambedkar advocated social justice without threat, fear and revenge (Raj Sirswal, 2016) .

2. Ambedkar's life and influence

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was born in Mhow, in central India on April 14, 1891, and belonged to a family of "Untouchables" or Dalits. This experience enabled him to observe social injustices in Indian society. He secured a scholarship for higher studies at the Columbia University. He was the first Indian to receive a Doctorate in Economics from this University. He also received a D.Sc. degree from the London School of Economics and an honorary doctorate from Bhagalpur University. In 1935, he settled down in Bombay and started the "Independent" newspaper to promote rationalist and social awakening. He openly opposed untouchability and presented evidence to expose the hypocrisy in the practices of Hindu orthodoxy. He established the "Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha" in 1924 to promote education, socio-economic development and political awareness among the untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar opposed the working and the social democracy of India in 1946. He played a pivotal role in the drafting of the Constitution of India, which was modeled on western democratic principles. As the chairman of the Drafting Committee, he emphasized the protection of individual rights and collective rights of minority groups against the tyranny of the majority. He recognized the Indian caste system as regulated by a vicious and endemic social stigma causing grievous harm to vast sections of the society. He contended that caste oppression operates through a complex network of individual and collective practices where victim dehumanization become commonplace. He argued that, a permanent solution to caste system would rest on the removal of discriminatory practices. He also conceded that the betterment of the caste system would still constitute an injustice to the dalits. He proposed a new social system based on liberty-equality-fraternity for the solution and opted Buddhist conversion for individual liberation (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). The Constitution of India was adopted on January 26, 1950 after Dr.Ambedkar's death on December 6, 1956.

3. Core ideas of social justice

Equal dignity means being free from bias or oppression, regardless of local circumstances like colour, fluency, or birth. It embraces all forms of discrimination, like caste, and applies dynamically through historical change. Education is crucial, as illiteracy reinforces exclusion.

Civil rights include freedoms, privileges, and protections guaranteed by law (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). Individuals should enjoy security and control over their own bodies. Fundamental rights include social opportunity, economic liberty, and educational access. Marginalized groups need collective protections within these universal principles. According to Dwivedi (2014), institutions help prevent violence against these groups. Ambedkar linked oppression and social injustice, focusing on caste as a critical form of deprivation. Caste determines individuals' status since birth, limiting feasible acquaintances, occupations, and prosperity (Raj Sirswal, 2014). In certain localities, caste-based restrictions thwart even access to water, harming fundamental rights. Caste thus constitutes an extreme violation of justice; attackers impede individuals' development and character-building. Illiteracy and forced labour persist in contemporary society due to such practices.

3.1. Equality and dignity

Social justice aims to ensure that all people live with dignity and their basic human

rights are recognized and protected. An important first step toward social justice is the acknowledgment that all human beings deserve equal respect. Everyone should enjoy dignity; experiences of bias and discrimination erode this fundamental aspect of personhood and inflict deep psychological harm (Raj Sirswal, 2014). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar insisted that universal human equality must be the very foundation of law and justice. Therefore, the preamble to the Indian Constitution, which he helped to draft, declares that India's republic must guarantee equality of status and opportunity before the law for all its citizens.

3.2. Civil rights and legal protection

Civil rights are guarantees of individual freedom including fundamental rights of all citizens to freedom of opinion, speech, expression, religion, assemblage, movement, and privacy at the same time civil rights also have the concept of due process of law, that no one shall be deprived of the life, liberty or freedom without the due process of the law. Civil rights are safeguarded by legal protection. It is the role of the executive to secure the citizen's civil rights, the legislative to define them, and the judiciary to adjudicate disputes regarding them. The final authority for the protection of civil rights is a democratic constitution. In India, it is contained in the Constitution of India (Raj Sirswal, 2014).

Legal protection is of utmost value to the backward class of citizens, which included the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker sections of society. Dr. Ambedkar, in his famous speech made on the 15th of August, 1947 emphasised the need of legal protection for the backward class of citizens out of which the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are of the utmost importance for they are totally deprived of civil rights. Because of the absence of civil rights the condition of the backward class of citizens is deplorable. It is not the lack of the laws but the violation of the laws which is a cause of continuing deprivation of their civil rights (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015).

3.3. Oppression and caste

Caste is a fundamental dimension of oppression according to Ambedkar. India's caste system is a forced social stratification of peoples into hierarchical groups, which originated in the religious beliefs and social customs of Hinduism. Caste is a myth of historical significance. For a caste system to take form, the peoples must be ascribed certain innate characteristics. Caste thus feeds a vicious cycle of oppression. The very myth of caste ought to be demolished if the caste system is to be eradicated. People must realise the truth that human beings are not restricted to any caste. Caste is not a social reality but an ideological construct. Through the misrepresentation of reality, misinformation is derived to delimit and enclose a person's behaviour, and restrict one's cerebral capability. Caste information reduces scope for improvement and extension of human capabilities. A caste system leads to chronic cases of oppression (Raj Sirswal, 2014).

3.4. Economic justice and opportunity

Social justice constitutes the fair and just distribution of societal resources, opportunities, and protections. Ambedkar's perspective on economic justice concentrates chiefly on three interconnected aspects: the means of production, wages, and occupational mobility. Broadly, fair access to necessary resources is both an essential prerequisite for human development and a fundamental determinant of the welfare, wellbeing, and opportunities available to individuals.

Fair access to necessary resources is both an essential prerequisite for human development and a fundamental determinant of the welfare, wellbeing, and opportunities available to individuals. Without adequate social security provisions,

individuals may become trapped in a state of extreme poverty characterized by the absence of food security, subsistence, sanitation, and basic education. These barriers limit employment prospects to menial, poorly paid work within the informal economy, depriving workers of benefits such as paid holidays, sick leave, and maternity provisions. Existing inequalities and barriers not only condemn large segments of the population to poverty depriving them of the right to an existence of dignity but also prevent society from fully harnessing the capabilities and talents of individuals.

4. Ambedkar's approach to democracy

Ambedkar's commitment to democracy permeates his political thought (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). A central concern is ensuring participation and voice for marginalized groups. Inclusive democracy means every individual enjoying voting rights and every community enjoying political representation—an ethos that also pervades the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar unequivocally condemned any constitution or system of government that did not provide for universal suffrage and full local autonomy, deeming such arrangements mere facades (Aditya, 2019).

Given the deeply entrenched social oppression faced by certain sections of the population, particularly by so-called Untouchables, mere franchise rights would be woefully inadequate. Ambedkar pointed to the existence of a substantial literature proposing additional protections for those subjected to social discrimination—a history he recognized even before his own involvement in the topic. Institutions that safeguard not only the vote but also the citizen's capacity to see and feel themselves as citizens, and that guarantee for vulnerable groups meaningful representation, become essential. Hence the foundation of his reservations about ballot secrecy, recognized not as a principle but as a technique that could further facilitate a ballot that remains silent even to the voters themselves.

Parallel issues arise in the realm of institutions. A democracy has a form that ought to be compatible with broad participation, fair institutional arrangements, and an equitable distribution of opportunity and voice in society. That form presupposes basic protections against entrapping individuals in a representation they could not themselves freely sanction. But the form alone does not bar institutions of domination, nor does it clarify the criteria for fair rules to govern those institutions. Ambedkar cautioned against envisaging democracy merely as a set of details concerning the operation of periodic elections. Political equality, he argued, does not suffice unless translated into adequate opportunity for the equally fundamental human aspirations of economic equality and social dignity.

4.1. Participation and voice for marginalized groups

Democracy is an important means to achieve equality of opportunity. Individuals and groups must be able to participate in the democratic process on an equal footing. This includes seeking representation in decision-making processes, voting rights to select representatives, and the adoption of institutional measures to enhance voices that might otherwise remain unheard (Raj Sirswal, 2014). Such measures may include the requirement for the consideration of specific issues in policy debates and administrative processes, the provision of specific rights to raise concerns (for instance, petitions addressed to the head of State), the establishment of special bodies and mechanisms to receive reports on violations, and the dissemination of information to the general public. The goal is to ensure that the voices and opinions of all individuals are heard and that decisions are made in accordance with their expressed preferences.

4.2. Institutions and fair rules

Political societies require institutions—judiciaries, parliaments, and public

authorities—which constitute the framework of a democracy. Democracy also requires rules of procedure that people have legitimately agreed upon. These rules are embodied in the law of the land that seeks to ensure the protection of persons and property, a fair hearing for all in courts, universal access to investment capital, and protection against ethnic, gender, or social discrimination. The inclusion of such clauses in madrasah constitutions makes them compatible with Ambedkar's concept of social justice (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015) ; (D. Joshi, 2013).

5. Policy ideas and debates

Access to quality education on a par with the upper social class was considered an important instrument to eliminate the life-long effects of injustice inflicted on the socially deprived sections at the entry point (Aditya, 2019). Ambedkar stated that education is an important instrument of social conversion whose importance is emphasized in the Buddhist tradition. Education liberates the mind and exposes the student to new thoughts which are essential for human existence. The world of man cannot remain indifferent to adult education, reconstruction of thought and mass enlightenment. A twofold approach which included universalization of primary education for children and mass literacy to eliminate ignorance and prejudice was recommended. Study material, teaching training and grants for improvement of educational institutions were assured. Instruction in the mother-tongue should be provided.

The schools of both the upper social class and the socially deprived sections were ruined by the spread of large-scale violence (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). Casteist propaganda was conducted by textbooks and institutions. The teachers and education policy planners possessed caste affiliations. The curriculum largely expressed the mind set of caste. The emphasis was laid to conflict between castes. Caution should be taken about the historical facts in textbooks. Dr. Ambedkar wrote with pain that even quality education was subject to the scourge of caste.

Public and private employment was sought for the members of the Depressed Classes in large proportions, without exploitation, unreasonably low fare and Pay Scale, without harassment by the employer and work at home on wages (Raj Sirswal, 2016). Land ownership entitled all that minimum security to be free from the danger of eviction and domicile status entailed further security to live anywhere. The educational and cultural consciousness should be raised. Drafter of the Constitution, Law Minister and ardent advocate of Buddhist revival Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed that execution of caste system was an integral part of the social practice to maintain caste inequality, separating the superior and the inferior Contaminated Life—Life on Untouchables.

5.1. Education and social reform

Education plays a crucial role in addressing entrenched social problems that threaten democratic ideals. According to Ambedkar, it is a necessary condition for the reform of oppressive social practices, and greater access to education is an essential instrument of social justice (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). His substantive views on education reflected his understanding of the challenges posed by deeply entrenched and widespread social practices that he observed in society and how education could serve as a means for liberation (Raj Sirswal, 2016). He identified various social practices connected to the caste system, including illiteracy and economic dependence, as obstacles to the proper exercise of freedom by the weaker sections of society.

5.2. Labour, land, and welfare

The mass of unskilled labour, landless labour, and casual labour has remained outside the social order for centuries, and modernization without the inclusion of this labour force is questionable. Maintaining artificial divisions in working classes, which constitute

the bulk of the Indian population, is an obstacle to the development of social order. The importance of social welfare programmes relates largely to the inclusion of unskilled, landless, and casual labour in the social order. This sector must gradually be included in the governance process; otherwise, social justice will continue to be merely a slogan and action will be limited to welfare programmes. Government or society cannot disable a citizen with unemployment and deny him his right to a liveable income through an occupation commensurate with dignity.

Ambedkar's attention to the dignity of labour makes him an eminent scholar in the domain of social justice. He believed that labour is prior to land and welfare social consumption. According to him, the quantity of work determines how much right one has over land and its earnings. Income-level growth without securing labour and its dignity is fundamental to Ambedkar's vision of development and social welfare (B Ravindra, 2016).

Ambedkar frequently raised the issue of land distribution and control over its earnings in parliamentary debates. Conditions created by land tenure systems and other factors, poverty of peasants, and the limited outlook of east Indian states inhibit land distribution from becoming an instrument of social justice (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015).

5.3. Reform of caste practices

Many caste-based practices have persisted among certain communities. These include (i) restrictions on marriage involving partners of the same gotra or within village boundaries from the same nakshatra, (ii) the prohibition of dining together by collateral cousins, (iii) the avoidance of contact with maternal relatives, and (iv) the rejection of remarrying after death. These practices arise from beliefs that cousins and maternal relatives supplant more important natural relationships, or that the maternal family destroys the maternal lineage, and that the death of a spouse invalidates a couple's partnership in life (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015).

In the political realm, Ambedkar insisted that only if entire castes ceased to exist could caste slavery be abolished. Social reforms must therefore extend both to caste practices still accepted among certain communities and to the regulation of these practices. In his view, if Mahars, for example, accepted caste practices, they remained slaves—even if unable to convert to Buddhism. The State should therefore impose a total ban on caste. Social reforms should include legislation to render an individual incapable of accepting caste if such acceptance occurred after conversion, and legislation preventing the establishment of a caste after conversion. Efforts should also promote the redistribution of earned wealth and the cessation of interference in the wealth of the son or daughter (Raj Sirswal, 2014).

6. Ambedkar's legacy in social justice today

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas on social justice hold significant relevance today. He viewed inequality and discrimination as on-going social injustices. His proposals for political, cultural, and educational equality remain crucial for the advancement of civil rights, women's rights, and other groups. He argued for social justice through democratic institutions, anti-discrimination laws, and equitable political representation. Galvanized by caste oppression, he warned against the insidious nature of social injustice and the urgent need to combat it. His thoughtful prescriptions for tackling these issues—including legislation, public policy, and education—remain instructive amid on-going struggles to realize the ideal of universal social justice across the globe (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015).

Social injustices manifest in new guises and forms. The quest for equality and rights

extends to impoverished migrant workers, rural landless laborers, tribal communities, marginalized religious minorities, and others. The economic transition produced richer and poorer in narrow but influential strata. The emergence of technology and digital networks has created novel inequalities of access and use, altering lifestyles and power structures, effectively embedding new oppressive forms. Missed access grows imperceptibly. Inheriting issues from the past continues to fuel Ambedkarite movements for socio-economic and political democratization.

6.1. Lessons for equality and rights

Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the need to address social injustices pervasive in society. Individuals, who are not equal to the highest standards of humanity, cannot enjoy high status. Their potential is either wasted or exploited, as they are forced to remain at the bottom of society. Political justice thus becomes meaningless, where citizens do not enjoy equal rights.

Practical lessons can be derived for protecting equality, liberty, and dignity of individuals in society, irrespective of caste, religion, or minority status that can be reflected in law and policy formation, institutional conduct, political discourse, and in everyday affairs. Equality before law and equal protection of the laws must be guaranteed in the constitution (Raj Sirswal, 2014). A society where certain citizens are deprived of fundamental rights and dignified living cannot be considered as a true self-governing society. Freedom from want and self-hood are essential minimum requisites of democracy (SAMPATHKUMAR, 2015). Though the ideal of liberty sought is not universally accepted, the need for liberty is universally recognized. Measurements can be taken to avoid derailing the core principle of human rights and liberty as stipulated in the constitution on an ideological basis.

6.2. Challenges and on-going work

The Constitution of India, a great political and social instrument, adopted the language of social justice and probes the evils of inequality, poverty, casteism, and untouchability. Yet, even after 75 years, the country has yet to manifest conditions where the citizen enjoys full human rights and dignity. Today, caste is the largest word in Indian politics. With the globalisation process, a new formidable hierarchy and stratification based on new criteria have entered the scene, giving rise to caste and religion-based political parties. With the increase of the Dalit-Bahujan mass consciousness, caste politics also has acquired a new shape. Many discuss “caste system” without understanding casteism as a kind of social injustice. Many argue that caste exists in every society. The Dalit Movement and Bahujan Movement reject this argument. Apart from caste and religion, social injustice and discrimination have appeared and still exist on the basis of race, nation, culture, language, ideology, and economy. Therefore, strategies to tackle caste as well as culture should function simultaneously, which requires a careful analysis of other movements and Blueprints of Action.

The Indian Constitution and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the nation’s founding father and chief architect of the Constitution, attempted to formulate the socio-political scheme of the country with a special reference to these oppressive terms. Though the rhetoric of social justice sounds attractive and impressive, based on one’s interaction with a variety of people on various occasions it appears that contemporary society still does not comprehend the meaning of social justice. Different sets of factors are freely mixed with one another: e.g. Dalit movement, minority politics, liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, Brahmanism, Neo-Buddhism, rights, fundamental freedoms, the Indian Constitution, reservation, oppression etc. As a consequence, there seems to be confusion among the educated elite, social workers, practitioners and followers of various movements, and

some people state that “social justice is not possible and still it is too early to discuss,” and call it utopian. After seven decades of Independence and sustained efforts, social justice is probably going deeper down to the very foundation and core of society rather than progressing (Aditya, 2019) (Raj Sirswal, 2016).

7. Conclusion

The political ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar express deep concerns for equality, rights, and justice and remain remarkably current today. He analysed fundamental injustices affecting large sections of society and proposed reforms and policies addressing those injustices through a political framework consonant with modern democracy. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that social injustice is fundamentally political and addressed it mainly through the lens of democracy the system of politics more broadly regarded as the most just system of governance since it accords a formal equal voice to each citizen. However, he maintained that democracy was insufficiently inclusive, particularly in India since independence, as the centrality of caste, an impermissible enabler of injustice, had tended to escape notice. He consequently argued for widespread political participation and representation and for new democratic institutions and processes amplifying the voices of the very large numbers of citizens still subjected to the systematic injustices and exclusion arising from caste.

The educational and social ambitions of wide segments of the disadvantaged were frustrated by a variety of barriers—land ownership, job opportunities, even interpersonal prejudices—unaddressed in the arguments for democracy. Policy interventions on land, welfare, labour, and education addressed these barriers directly and led to the formulation of accompanying anti-caste proposals. Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas provided an ultimately simple and coherent schema for defining, analyzing, and remedying social injustices, directly opening up significant lines of policy response appropriate in contemporary India and, even more generally, across a remarkable range of other social injustices still persisting.

Author’s Declaration:

I/We, the author(s)/co-author(s), declare that the entire content, views, analysis, and conclusions of this article are solely my/our own. I/We take full responsibility, individually and collectively, for any errors, omissions, ethical misconduct, copyright violations, plagiarism, defamation, misrepresentation, or any legal consequences arising now or in the future. The publisher, editors, and reviewers shall not be held responsible or liable in any way for any legal, ethical, financial, or reputational claims related to this article. All responsibility rests solely with the author(s)/co-author(s), jointly and severally. I/We further affirm that there is no conflict of interest financial, personal, academic, or professional regarding the subject, findings, or publication of this article.

References:

1. Raj Sirswal, D. (2016). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Maker of Modern India.
2. SAMPATHKUMAR, M. (2015). Study on Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Social Ideology View.
3. Raj Sirswal, D. (2014). The Philosophy of Dalit Liberation.
4. SAMPATHKUMAR, M. (2015). B.R.Ambedkar Philosophy on Indian Democracy A Study.
5. Aditya, I. (2019). An Evaluative Study of Political Thinking of B.R.Ambedkar: A Critical Underpinning.
6. SAMPATHKUMAR, M. (2015). Indian Constitution the Vision of B. R. Ambedkar.
7. D. Joshi, D. (2013). Dr. Ambedkar and Drafting of Indian Constitution: A ‘See Through’ into the Making of a Masterpiece from the Eyes of its Architect.
8. B Ravindra, K. (2016). Labour Welfare and Social Security.
9. Ambedkar, B. R. (1936/2014). Annihilation of caste. Navayana.
10. Ambedkar, B. R. (1946/2018). Who were the Shudras? Critical Quest.
11. Ambedkar, B. R. (1948/2019). The untouchables: Who were they and why they became untouchables? Critical Quest.

12. Joshi, D. (2013). Dr. Ambedkar and drafting of Indian Constitution: A “see through” into the making of a masterpiece from the eyes of its architect.
13. Ravindra, K. B. (2016). Labour welfare and social security.
14. Sampathkumar, M. (2015). B. R. Ambedkar philosophy on Indian democracy: A study.
15. Sampathkumar, M. (2015). Indian Constitution: The vision of B. R. Ambedkar.

Cite this Article-

"Dr. Vishavjeet Singh", 'Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Political Concept of Social Justice' Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal (RVIMJ), ISSN: 3048-7331 (Online), Volume:1, Issue:05, December 2024.

Journal URL- <https://www.researchvidyapith.com/>

DOI- 10.70650/rvimj.2024v1i50013

Published Date- 13 December 2024