

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Voice of the Voiceless

Opinion / Commentary | Volume 1 | Issue 3 | 2026 | Article Number: 028

Accepted: 30 July 2026 | Published: 10 August 2026 | ISSN: 2979-8582 (Online)



Crossref : <https://doi.org/10.67693/BJCR-T7NM7BP6>



Dr Dharmendra Jha¹, Dr. Chhomu²

¹HoD, Department of Political Science, Government College Doimukh, Midpu, Papumpare, Arunachal Pradesh India

²Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government College Doimukh, Midpu, Papumpare, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Correspondence: Dr Dharmendra Jha, dharmendrajha1968@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the upliftment of the downtrodden population of India. It discusses his role in promoting social justice, equality, education, constitutional democracy, and the rights of marginalized communities. The paper highlights Ambedkar's efforts in challenging caste discrimination and advocating for inclusive national development. It concludes that his vision and reforms continue to influence contemporary Indian society and remain relevant to the pursuit of social equality and human dignity.

Keywords: B. R. Ambedkar, Social Justice, Indian Constitution, Dalit Empowerment, Equality, Human Rights

Dr. B.R Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. Born into a Dalit Mahar family, his early life was defined by severe caste- based discrimination. In school, he and other Dalit students were forced to sit on the floor outside the classroom or on gunny sacks they had to bring from home. Dalit children were not permitted to touch common water taps or vessels. Upper Caste people had to pour water for them from a distance, and if no one was available, Ambedkar had to go thirsty. Despite these hardships, his father encouraged his education, driving Ambedkar to become a pioneering scholar, jurist and the architect of the Indian Constitution. Because his father served as a Subedar in the British Indian Army, granting the family slightly more stability and access to education than most Dalits of the era. Despite the ostracization, Ambedkar excelled academically. In 1907, he achieved a historic milestone by passing his matriculation exam from Elphinstone High School, making him one of the very first Dalits to do so. He then enrolled at Elphinstone College in 1908, becoming the first from the untouchable community to enter the prestigious institution. After earning his BA in Economics and Political Science

from Bombay University in 1912, his intellect caught the attention of Sayajirao Gaikwad III, the Maharaja of Baroda. The ruler awarded Ambedkar a monthly scholarship of Rs 25, allowing him to travel to the United States and enrolled at Columbia University in 1913, where he eventually earned his M.A and Ph. D degrees.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar's role as a voice for the voiceless is foundational to modern India. He broke centuries of silence by legally dismantling the caste system, securing political representation, and demanding equal rights for Dalits and women. He had a multifaceted career, working extensively as a jurist, economist, politician, social reformer, and author. Most notably, he served as the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and is recognized as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar made significant contributions across several core areas.

Ambedkar vehemently critiqued Hinduism for its inherent inequalities, particularly the caste system, untouchability, and the subjugation of women. He argued that because Hinduism's foundational scriptures sanctioned discrimination by birth, the religion could not be reformed from within, eventually leading him to embrace Buddhism. In his seminal text 'Annihilation of Caste', he argued that the caste system was not merely a division of labour, but a brutal "division of laborers". He maintained that as long as Hindus believed this hierarchy was divinely sanctioned by texts like the Vedas and Shastras, genuine social equality was impossible. Unlike other reformers of his time who sought to modify the Varna (social class) system, Ambedkar rejected it entirely. He believed that the core philosophy of Hinduism was fundamentally opposed to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He highlighted how Hindu religious codes, such as the Manusmriti, severely degraded women and permanently subjected them to the control of men, denying them independence and social equality. He argued that Hinduism suppressed rational inquiry and moral autonomy, demanding unquestioning obedience to rigid caste rules over broader ethical behavior. Because he concluded that the religion was fundamentally irredeemable and inherently unjust to "untouchables" (Dalits), Ambedkar famously declared in 1935 that he was born a Hindu but would not die a Hindu. After decades of studying various faiths, he chose to convert to Navayana Buddhism (a form of Buddhism emphasizing reason, equality, and social action) in a historic ceremony in Nagpur on October 14, 1956.

Ambedkar viewed Brahmanism as an oppressive ideology that institutionalized birth- based inequality and graded inequality to maintain the socio-economic supremacy of the priestly class. He analysed texts like the Manusmriti and the Bhagavad Gita, arguing they were deliberately designed to enforce the Chaturvarnya (four-tire-caste system) and deny Dalits and Shudras basic human rights and education. He framed Indian history as a continuous conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism, maintaining that Buddhist philosophy actively subverted the rigid, hierarchical controls imposed by Brahmanical elites. He concluded that to achieve social justice, the caste system had to be destroyed, which required explicitly rejecting the religious authority and sacred texts that sustained Brahmanical privilege. He pointed out historical ironies within Brahmanism, such as how ancient Brahmins were originally beef- eaters, but strategically adopted cow worship as a socio- political tool. Ambedkar stressed on true religious emancipation of Dalits. In 1927, he famously burned Manusmriti in presence of thousands of his followers (Dalits). He rejected the perspective of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that religion could be reformed from within, countering that caste was not a misinterpretation of Hinduism but its foundational pillar. He recognized that religious doctrine played a major role in the psychological enslavement of marginalized groups. Therefore, he championed religious conversion as a radical act of self- liberation. To him, conversion was a strategic socio- political necessity rather than merely a change in faith. It was an avenue to reclaim self- worth, and access to an alternative egalitarian social structure.

Ambedkar viewed education as the powerful catalyst for social justice. He summarized its core importance with the famous rallying cry: “Educate, Agitate, Organize”. He argued that education is an instrument of emancipation, stating that education is a weapon meant to eradicate social slavery, foster mental development, and secure both economic independence and political freedom. He established People’s Education Society to open schools, colleges and hostels for marginalized communities. On June 14, 1928, he founded the Depressed Classes Education Society in Bombay to promote education among Dalits by opening study circles and libraries. On June 8, 1945, he established the People's Education Society, which went on to build several schools and colleges across Maharashtra. People’s Education Society established Siddharth College (1946) in Bombay and Milind College (1950) in Aurangabad to provide quality higher education to underprivileged students in the region. Similarly Siddharth Law College was started in 1956 to provide legal education to aspiring lawyers from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ambedkar established a network of hostels and schools in cities like Panvel, Thane, Nasik, and Pune so students from rural areas could access education without facing housing discrimination.

Ambedkar recognized education as a vital weapon to fight injustice and exploitation, stating that every educational institute should serve as an agency of social change. He championed the cause of free and compulsory education, heavily influencing the inclusion of Article 45 (which advocates for free and compulsory education for children up to 14 years) in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. He supported the creation of industrial schools to make marginalized communities economically self-sufficient and self-reliant. He was strongly in favour of female education, firmly believing that educating a woman uplifts entire generations. Ambedkar believed that an enlightened and educated citizenry is the absolute prerequisite for a successful democracy. Education instills critical thinking and an understanding of human rights and justice. In fact, he viewed education as a means to give voice to the voiceless sections of society.

Ambedkar was aware of the fact that without upliftment of women equality cannot be achieved. He laid the foundation for modern women’s rights in India through pathbreaking constitutional guarantees and legislative reforms. His relentless advocacy granted women equal voting rights, enshrined gender equality in the constitution, and culminated in the Hindu Code Bill, which revolutionized property, marriage, and inheritance rights for women. As the chief architect of the constitution, he ensured gender equality through Fundamental Rights like Article 14 (Equality before Law), Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex), and Article 16 (Equality of opportunity). Through Hindu Code Bill, he wanted to eradicate patriarchal traditions. As early as 1928 and throughout his time in the Bombay Legislative Assembly, Ambedkar advocated for birth control for women. He was also instrumental in instituting the Maternity Benefit Act and advocate for universal adult franchise, ensuring Indian women had the right to vote from the nation’s inception. He continuously emphasized the need for women’s representation in legislative bodies to ensure their voices were heard at the highest levels of governance. He published journals like Mook Nayak and actively encouraged women to participate in early civil rights movements, such as the Mahad Satyagraha, declaring, “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”. During historic platforms like the All India Depressed Classes Women’s Conference in the 1920s, Ambedkar urged women to be educated, independent and aware of their legal rights. He insisted that “male education is persuaded side by side with female education” to ensure holistic societal development.

Through publication of several journals, Ambedkar advocated for the comprehensive human rights, social equality, and economic emancipation of Dalits and marginalized communities. His journals frequently challenged caste-based oppression, including the hierarchical stigmatization of traditional food practices (such as eating beef) that were forced upon Dalits due to systematic exclusion from upper-caste food

systems. The primary newspapers and periodicals published and edited by Ambedkar for the broader upliftment and empowerment of depressed classes include:

- **Moonknayak (Leader of the Voiceless):** Launched as a Marathi fortnightly in 1920, this was his first publication and laid the foundation for an assertive Dalit Political Voice.
- **Bahishkrit Bharat (Excluded India):** A Marathi fortnightly started in 1927 that highlighted the specific social problems of the untouchables and provided a platform to challenge discriminatory social practices.
- **Samta (Equality):** Started in 1928, this newspaper served as an official organ for the Samta Sangh, an organization founded to promote social equality.
- **Janta (The People):** A weekly newspaper launched in 1930 that highlighted the problems and grievances of the Dalits.
- **Prabuddha Bharat (Enlightened India):** This was the renamed iteration of the Janata newspaper, continuing his mission of intellectual and spiritual awakening following his conversion to Buddhism in 1956.

For Ambedkar, social justice was the foundation of a truly democratic society. He believed that political freedom is meaningless without social and economic equality, advocating for the active upliftment of the marginalized groups to erase centuries of discrimination. His concept of social justice is grounded in the triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It goes beyond legal equality to demand the active dismantling of caste hierarchies and the economic, political and social empowerment of historically marginalized communities. Ambedkar understood that simply granting equal rights to people who had been oppressed for centuries was insufficient. He advocated for a supportive polity where the state actively intervenes through preferential treatments.

His ideas of social and economic democracy are focused on bringing maximum equality in the society. He argued that political democracy cannot survive without social democracy, viewing it as a prerequisite that eradicates the deep-rooted caste system and ensures true economic and social justice. Ambedkar viewed democracy not just as a system of parliamentary governance, but as a mode of “associated living” and conjoint communicated experience among equals. His vision required a complete restructuring of both the social order and the economy to prevent subjugation of the marginalized. He believed that if political democracy (one person, one vote) operates in a society fractured by rigid hierarchies like the caste system, it only empowers the privatized while marginalizing the oppressed. He stated, “Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy”. In his work *States and Minorities* (1947), he advocated for state control over key industries and agriculture to prevent economic exploitation, ensure rapid development, and guarantee a basic standard of living. In his seminal essay *Small Holdings in India and Remedies* (1918), he advocated for the nationalization of agricultural land, state socialism, and the industrialization of farming, arguing that small, fragmented landholdings and caste-based land ownership caused economic distress. His solution was to eliminate private landlordism, consolidate farms, and establish state managed collective farming.

Ambedkar viewed labor rights as fundamental to social justice, individual liberty and economic democracy, serving as the Labour Member in the Viceroy’s Executive Council (1942-1946), he revolutionized Indian Labor Policy by reducing daily working hours from 12 to 8, securing equal pay for equal work, mandating trade union recognition, and laying the groundwork for maternity benefits, provident funds, and Employees’ State Insurance (ESI). He believed that a laborer requires both equality and liberty to live a dignified life. He integrated these economic rights into the Indian Constitution,

ensuring safeguards against forced labor and child exploitation (Articles 23, 24, and 39 of the Constitution). He staunchly defended the worker's strike, equating it with the right to freedom. However, he argued that it should be used sparingly, primarily for the worker's economic welfare rather than as a tool for narrow political objectives. He advocated for the state's active role in protecting the working class. This included enacting the minimum wages act and the industrial employment act to formalize employment terms, prevent exploitation, and ensure worker's basic needs are met. He further believed that marginalized workers required independent political organization to secure their rights. He founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to elevate laborers' status beyond just survival, emphasizing fair wages and social security.

Ambedkar's economic ideas are deeply significant for establishing the link between economic justice and social democracy. He argued that political democracy cannot succeed without economic democracy. In fact he was a pioneering economist whose proposals revolutionized India's financial architecture. His visionary monetary doctrines were primarily detailed in his famous 1923 book, *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*. He was the chief architect behind the creation of the Reserve Bank of India. He fiercely advocated for an independent central monetary authority separate from political control to manage the money supply, regulate commercial banks, and protect public deposits. He opposed the Colonial Gold Exchange Standard (where the Rupee was tied to the British pound) because it overvalued the Indian currency, distorted trade, and facilitated a drain of wealth. He advocated for a Gold Standard to ensure domestic price equilibrium and stability in international trade. He warned that reckless and unlimited money printing acts as a regressive tax, disproportionately eroding the purchasing power of the laboring and poorer classes. He strongly prioritized internal price stability over external exchange rate manipulation. He proposed demonetizing the currency every 10 years to combat inflation, eliminate black money, and neutralize the circulation of fake currency. He argued that a sound monetary policy must work in tandem with an individual's capacity to pay, protecting the marginalized from discriminatory financial burdens.

It is pertinent to mention that Ambedkar went to the extent of challenging Gandhi for establishing a society based on equality and social justice. Comparing Gandhi and Ambedkar is crucial because it frames the foundational debate on social justice, human rights, and statecraft in modern India. While both sought to uplift the marginalized, Gandhi advocated for social reforms within the existing Hindu framework, championing non-violence and self-sufficient villages. Ambedkar demanded structural change, constitutional rights, and total annihilation of the caste system. Gandhi criticized untouchability but initially supported the ancient Varna system (division of labor), believing caste divisions could function harmoniously if divested of hierarchy. He coined the term Harijan (children of God) for untouchables. Ambedkar vehemently rejected this, arguing in his famous book "*Annihilation of caste*" that caste is a system of 'division of laborers' enforced by religion, which must be completely destroyed. Their most famous clash occurred over the 1932 Communal Award. Ambedkar demanded separate electorates to secure genuine political autonomy for Dalits. Gandhi opposed this, arguing it would permanently fracture Hindu society, and undertook a fast unto death, which led to the Poona Pact replacing separate electorates with reserved seats. Gandhi treated all religions as equal and sought to reform Hinduism from within. Ambedkar believed Hinduism was inherently discriminatory and saw no path to equality within its fold. Gandhi favoured decentralized village-based economies and limited state authority, envisioning self-sufficient rural republics. Conversely, Ambedkar supported a robust parliamentary democracy with strong central authority and constitutional safeguards, fearing that localized power in villages would lead to upper-caste domination and narrow-mindedness.

Like Gandhi, Ambedkar fundamentally differed from Jawaharlal Nehru on the issue of social justice.

Nehru favoured state- led economic socialism, parliamentary sovereignty, and viewed class inequality as the primary issue. Conversely, Ambedkar prioritized social discrimination, and individual rights over state power. Nehru believed economic restructuring and heavy industrialization would naturally uplift marginalized communities. Ambedkar argued that economic reform was secondary to social reform; he asserted that true democracy was impossible without total and complete removal of the caste system. Nehru envisioned a highly centralized state guiding development through centralized planning. Ambedkar was deeply suspicious of majority tyranny and concentrated power, advocating instead for constitutionalism, a strong federal structure, and robust legal safeguards to protect minority and Dalit rights. While Nehru was largely indifferent to religion and viewed it as a barrier to scientific progress, Ambedkar recognized religion's systemic role in societal oppression. Despite these intellectual debates, they collaborated closely on landmark legislation like the Hindu Code Bill- championed by Ambedkar and backed by Nehru- which revolutionized property and inheritance rights for Hindu women.

Ambedkar used his role as chairman of the Drafting Committee to embed robust legal protections and affirmative action into the Indian Constitution. His visionary leadership transformed the document into an instrument of Dalit empowerment, ensuring historical injustices were directly addressed through guaranteed civil rights. His primary constitutional contributions to Dalit empowerment include:

- **Abolition of Untouchability:** Ambedkar championed Article 17, which abolished untouchability and made its practice in any form a punishable offense. It stands as one of the most absolute fundamental rights.
- **Prohibition of Discrimination:** Article 15 prohibits discrimination by the state or private individuals against any citizen on grounds of caste, race, religion or place of birth.
- **Affirmative Action (Reservations):** Recognizing the systematic marginalization of Dalits, he successfully incorporated reservation policies for scheduled castes (sc) in educational institutions, government employment, and legislative bodies to ensure adequate political representation.
- **Universal Adult Franchise:** He fought to grant every citizen the right to vote, irrespective of their social and economic standing, breaking away from historical property or tax- based restrictions to guarantee political empowerment through the ballot box.

Ambedkar remains profoundly relevant in contemporary studies as a foundational thinker on social justice, constitutionalism, and intersectional discrimination. His critiques of structural inequality, frameworks for affirmative action, and advocacy for marginalized empowerment provide vital analytical lenses for addressing modern human rights, systemic exclusion, and democratic backsliding worldwide. Ambedkar's emphasis on 'constitutional morality' acts as a critical bulwark against majoritarianism in contemporary Political Science. Scholars use this framework to analyse the balance of power, secularism, and protection of minority rights. His seminal text *Annihilation of caste* provides the bedrock for understanding how entrenched social hierarchies lead to institutional exclusion, labour division, and modern- day discrimination. His work anticipates modern theories of intersectionality. In developmental Economics, his early writings on land reforms, the management of small landholdings, and labor rights continue to guide debates on rural poverty, industrialization and economic equality in South Asia. Ambedkar's drafting of the Hindu Code Bill and his advocacy for women's property and marital rights are foundational to contemporary gender studies. His transition to Buddhism, viewed as a form of social philosophy and liberation theology, informs contemporary studies on religious conversion, human dignity and the pursuit of a casteless society.

World leaders view Ambedkar as a global icon of human rights, social justice, and constitutional

democracy, often drawing parallels between his anti- caste movement and the African American civil rights struggle. In a 2010 address to the Indian Parliament, Barack Obama celebrated Ambedkar as an example of empowerment, acknowledging him as the visionary who drafted the Indian Constitution and protected the rights of all citizens. KR Narayana, former president of India, stated, “Dr. Ambedkar was not just a leader of the Dalits, but a leader of all Indians. He was a great statesman and a visionary who gave India its modern, democratic and Secular Constitution”. W.E.B. Du Bois (African- American Civil Rights Leader and Scholar) in a 1946 letter to Ambedkar stated, “I have followed your career with great interest and I am glad to know that in India, you are fighting for the same ends for which the colored people in the US are striving. Nelson Mandela often drew inspiration from Ambedkar, citing him as a prominent figure in the worldwide fight against discrimination and systemic inequality. Martin Luther King III during an international conference described Ambedkar and Martin Luther King Jr. as “brother revolutionaries”, noting their shared mission to mobilize people against discrimination through education and organization. Amartya Sen regards Ambedkar as his “father in economics” praising his profound intellectual work and arguing that his political and social philosophies deserve far more global recognition. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has frequently lauded Ambedkar’s legacy, highlighting his role in the eradication of untouchability and praising the constitution as a fundamental guiding force for India’s social justice and development.

Dr. Ambedkar was truly the voice of the voiceless. He was far more than the chief architect of the Indian Constitution; he was the enduring conscience of a fractured society and the ultimate voice of its most marginalized millions. By dismantling centuries of systemic oppression and enshrining the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity into the nation’s foundational laws, he provided a permanent framework for democratic dignity. His rallying cry to “educate, agitate, and organize” remains a vital catalyst for modern social justice movements, ensuring that his vision of an inclusive, egalitarian India continues to inspire the global fight for human rights. Today, his legacy endures not just as a historical triumph, but as an active, guiding force reminding us that the journey toward a truly just society requires continuous vigilance, empathy, and the active empowerment of every silent voice.

References

- Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste*, Fingerprint Publishing, June, 2023.
- Ambedkar, B.R., *My Autobiography*, Prabhat Prakashan, Pvt. Ltd, April, 2024.
- Ambedkar, B.R., *Riddles in Hinduism*, Suddhir Prakashan, 2020.
- Ambedkar, B.R., *who were the Shudras*, Prabhat Prakashan, 2020.
- Bahadur, Raj. *A Glance at Dr. Ambedkar’s Writings*, Forward Press, February 10, 2017.
- Bhalla, Vikram. *Ambedkar Jayanti: Intriguing Facts and Inspiring Quotes*, The Times of India, April 14, 2023.
- Chakrabarty, Roshni. *BR Ambedkar’s Untold Stories: How a boy denied water, wrote India’s Constitution*, India Today, April 14, 2025.
- Gudavarthy, Ajay. *Ambedkar Under the lens*, Frontline, November 27, 2024.
- Guha, Ramchandra. *Appreciating Ambedkar*, The Telegraph, April 8, 2023.
- Ilangovan, Rajasekaran. *Ambedkar and Periyar*, Frontline, November 11, 2015.

- Kamali, Saeed. From Untouchable to Architect of India's Constitution, The Guardian, November 3, 2023.
- Kaur, Gurmeet. The Role of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar in Promoting Social Harmony Through Education and Empowerment, International Journal of Political Science and Governance, Vol- 7 ((12), December, 2025.
- Kumar, Dilip. Dr. B.R Ambedkar, the Leader of Voiceless- A Dream of Casteless Social System Unfulfilled, yet the Legacy remains. RAIJMR, Vol- 6 (I), January, 2018.
- Kumar Awanish. Reservations: A Project of Nation building, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol-56 (45-46), November 6, 2021.
- Noorani, A.G., Squandered Heritage, Frontline, June 10, 2015.
- Paik Shailaja. Dalit Feminist Thought, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol-56 (25), June 19, 2021.
- Prabakaran, B. The Art of the Oppressed, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- 56 (52), December 25, 2021.
- Rajguru, Richa. Ambedkar: Exemplary Statesman, The Times of India, April 26, 2021.
- Ram, N. Relevance of Ambedkar, Frontline, November 10, 2020.
- S, Paramjit. Ambedkar, Gandhians and the Indian Village, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- 56 (12), March 20, 2021.
- Sarin, Neha. Ambedkar: An Architect of Modern Inclusive Society, International Journal of Political Science and Governance, Vol- 3 (2), 2021.
- Singh, Hira. Ambedkar and Dalit Sports: Caste and Bombay City, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- 58 (20), May 20, 2023
- Singh, Mahender. Ambedkar's Philosophy of Religion: An Evolutionary Perspective, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, Vol- 30 (I), 2024.
- Singh, Rajnath. Indian First and Indian Last: Dr. Ambedkar, A Visionary Reformer,, The Times of India, April 15, 2025.
- Singh, Rathore. Becoming Babasaheb, Harper Collins Publishers India, April, 2023.
- Stroud, Scott. Excessively Harsh Critique and Democratic Rhetoric: The Enigma of Ambedkar's Riddles in Hinduism, Journal for the History of Rhetoric, Vol- 25 (i), March 1, 2022.
- Sud, Dinesh. The Fascinating Story of Dr. Ambedkar, The Times of India, October 17, 2020.
- Teltumbde, Anand. Why Ambedkar rejected Gandhi's Idea of Dalit Emancipation, Frontline, October, 2024.
- Tharoor, Shashi. Why India today shouldn't Forget the Legacy of Ambedkar, Time Magazine, May 24, 2023.



©2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).