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## DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION: A BUDDHIST VISION OF EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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### ABSTRACT

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, envisioned constitutional democracy as a powerful instrument for social transformation rooted in ethical and humanitarian values. This study examines Ambedkar's constitutional vision through the lens of his Buddhist philosophy, highlighting how principles of equality, social justice, and human dignity informed the foundational framework of the Indian Constitution. Rejecting caste-based hierarchy and social exclusion, Ambedkar drew upon Buddhist ideals of rationality (*prajñā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and moral conduct (*sīla*) to articulate a constitutional order committed to liberty, equality, and fraternity. The paper explores how Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism shaped his approach to fundamental rights, safeguards for marginalized communities, and the concept of constitutional morality. By analyzing the convergence of Buddhist ethics and modern constitutionalism, the study argues that the Indian Constitution represents not merely a legal document but a moral charter aimed at eradicating social suffering and institutionalized inequality. The research underscores Ambedkar's enduring legacy in integrating spiritual humanism with legal rationality to construct an inclusive and egalitarian post-colonial Indian state.

**KEYWORDS:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar; Indian Constitution; Buddhism; Social Justice; Equality; Constitutional Morality; Dalit Emancipation; Human Dignity

## INTRODUCTION

Republic Day of India originated with the official promulgation of its own constitution on January 26, 1950. This supreme law of the country shaped post-colonial India and the India we know today. Since its adoption in 1950, it has never been destroyed, making it one of the world's most remarkable constitutions. Besides its age and unique character, it also boasts the longest constitution in the world. Over the past seven decades, the Indian Constitution has undergone numerous amendments and additions, totaling 395 articles.

The Indian Constitution was created by Dr. Ambedkar, a low-status Indian who was discriminated against due to his birth as a Dalit. Ambedkar's story is like the first doorway to the history of the Dalit people, opening it to all interested people of all races, allowing them to experience the lives, principles, and aspirations of the non-caste people. He designed the constitution to respect all races, languages, religions, and regions. The constitution was designed to reflect this diversity and provide a framework for uniting the nation. He is a heroic figure in the struggle for the Dalits, or Dalits, in Indian society. He established various associations for them and led the revival of Buddhism. Throughout his life, he dedicated his life to helping the poor in India, transforming the minds and beliefs of the people towards acceptance of the Dalits. He opposed caste and Hinduism, calling for equal treatment, justice, and equality. In education, he focused on developing the knowledge and abilities of the Dalits, as well as emphasizing their rights as citizens.

Dr. Ambedkar called for legislation guaranteeing Dalit rights in politics, establishing proportionate representation for Dalit people in the political executive, and ensuring equal representation and economic status for Dalit people. Social status and educational advancement led the Untouchables to a Satyagraha. He saw Buddhism as a convenient way to create equality, a religion that does not discriminate and everyone is equal. Dr. Ambedkar's religious ideology sought a religion that emphasized reason, freeing them from divisions and groups, emphasizing the principle of individual equality. He encouraged the Dalits to convert to Buddhism, a religion that emphasized equality, as a condition for liberating them from the bonds of the caste system. He became a Buddhist and converted to Buddhism. He was appointed as the Minister of Justice and the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee of the Republic of India.

He is therefore known as the father of the Indian Constitution that has been in use until today. This supreme law of the country has shaped post-colonial India and has become the India of

today because this is a constitution that has been in use since 1950 without ever being torn up or redrafted even once.

### **Life and Education**

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, into the Sakpal family, a untouchable, the lowest-ranking group in Hinduism. His family lived in Mhow. Ambedkar's grandfather and father were both educated and proficient in the English language. They served in the British army and was more advanced than other untouchables. The Sepals recognized the importance of education and urged their children to attend school.

The Dalits in India are divided into several groups. Ambedkar's family was part of the Mahar group, one of the largest Dalits in India, prevalent in the western part of India, Maharashtra (Kuber, 2004). One theory suggests that Ambedkar's name comes from the village of Ambarvale. Another theory suggests that Ambedkar's name stems from the acceptance and opportunity granted him by a Brahmin teacher. Krishnaji Keshav Ambedkar A Brahmin teacher who took special care of him allowed him to use the surname "Ambedkar." Many assumed that Ambedkar was a Brahmin, which greatly reduced the friction he faced. Ambedkar therefore held this teacher in high regard, as the surname helped pave the way for him to become a key leader in the struggle to liberate the caste system (Balkrisna Govind Gokhale, 2015).

Dr. Ambedkar passed the university entrance exam, which enabled him to: Concurrently, he married a Dalit girl named Ramabai. Dr. Ambedkar's higher education was supported by a scholarship from Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaikwad of Baroda. At that time, Elphinstone College only accepted students from upper-caste Indian backgrounds and descendants of British colonial rule. He was one of the first non-caste members to be admitted to Elphinstone College, marking another milestone in Indian history, marking the first non-caste graduate from the college.

The early life of Dr. Ambedkar demonstrates that his early educational progress, particularly in his education, benefited from both the expansion of educational opportunities in Britain and the support for universal education from leaders in the nationalist movement. The progressives who were the upper caste people of India at that time. Ambedkar graduated from Elphinstone College and was again sponsored by Maharaja Sayaji Rao of Baroda. The Maharaja sent his son to Harvard University and Ambedkar to Columbia University. He spent three years in Columbia University the United States (1913-1916) where he completed both

his master's and doctoral degrees. He wrote his dissertation, "Administration and Finance of the East India Company," in 1915, and his subsequent doctoral dissertation, "National Dividend of India—a Historical and Analytical Study," in 1916, which was published by P.S. King & Co., London, under the title "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India." PhD dissertation, "The Problem of the Rupee—Its Origin and Its Solution," 1922 (Valerian Rodrigues, 2014).

### **Fight to Emancipate the Caste System**

In 1919 marked the beginning of Dr. Ambedkar's political emergence and his initiation into the movement for the non-caste. This was the year in which Dr. Ambedkar first participated in public speaking engagements. Furthermore, it opened up a space for non-caste individuals to express themselves politically in Indian society. Thereafter, Dr. Ambedkar's role as an orator made him a prominent figure in the movement for the non-caste. This was evident in the 1920 meeting of the Non-caste Conference chaired by the Maharaja of Kolhapur in Nagpur. Dr. Ambedkar stated his stance to the meeting: "Whether institutionally or personally, they have no right to defend the interests of the non-caste unless our movement is driven by the non-caste movement itself."

In Dr. Ambedkar's view, non-caste individuals must rely on their own efforts in the movement or stand up for it. The Satyagraha movement, led by Dr. Ambedkar, was a prominent event in the movement for the non-caste groups, which demanded access to water for consumption and for non-caste groups to Hindu temples. Some scholars believe that the use of Satyagraha was a technique that imitated the non-violent movement modeled after M.K. Gandhi. The Satyagraha movement to demand access to water for consumption and for non-caste groups at Mahad represented a demand from the bottom of the Indian superstructure at that time. It was a demand from the non-caste group, who held the lowest and most devalued status in Indian society, to bring about change for them, such as demanding human-like treatment and the provision of welfare benefits to them (Dhaktode, 2014).

Dr. Ambedkar's arousal of human equality led to a number of non-caste groups using public water sources for their own consumption. When the upper castes learned of this, they attacked the non-caste members who participated in the movement. As a result of this attack, Dr. Ambedkar decided to protest against the upper caste members by declaring his rejection of Manu Dharma, using the "burning of Manu Dharma." This marked the true beginning of the non-caste freedom movement. Dr. Ambedkar's academic writings on economics and his

arousal of non-caste members also motivated and galvanized the upper caste members to pay attention to the issues of the caste system through a speech he devoted time to present at the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore, an Arya Samaj conference. Dr. Ambedkar's speech A speech was prepared with a title that sounded very appropriate for the conference, Annihilation of Caste, 1936. However, this speech was rejected from being presented at the conference, so Dr. Ambedkar published it himself to spread his message of the abolition of caste to the Indian society at that time.

He strived hard to ensure equal access to education for men and women of the non-caste groups. His wish came true not because of God's will, but because of his own hard work, establishing the People's Education Society (PES) in 1945. The People's Education Society (PES) was Dr. Ambedkar's attempt to expand higher educational opportunities for non-caste groups in Maharashtra and throughout India. The PES comprised two major colleges: Siddharth College of Arts & Science (1946) in Bombay (1947) and Milind College (1950) in Aurangabad. These were founded by Dr. Ambedkar in the project for the education of the non-caste groups.

The political party founded by Dr. Ambedkar that was able to carry out political activities was the Independent Labour Party (ILP), a political party established before India's independence from Britain. The ILP was established in 1936 under the authority of the Government of India Act, 1935, with the aim of representing the non-caste community in the Provincial Legislature of Bombay Province. The ILP also proposed three distinctive policies: 1) to educate the people in democratic ways; 2) to introduce essential democratic ideologies or concepts; and 3) to encourage public participation in politics through the legislative process. Dr. Ambedkar was unique in his policy proposals, unlike other political leaders at the time, as the ILP emphasized democratic education and civic education (Dhaktode, 2014). Another political party that Dr. Ambedkar hoped to establish in a concrete form after India's independence from Britain was the Republican Party of India (RPI). Dr. Ambedkar attempted to collaborate with the Socialist Party of Ram Manohar Lohia, S.M. Joshi, P.K. Atre, and others. The aim was to serve as an opposition party in the Indian Parliament and to represent the interests of the poor working class, who were largely non-caste and Adivasi. However, the RPI did not fully achieve this goal because Dr. Ambedkar passed away before he could establish it as an alternative party for the non-caste groups. The establishment of political parties for non-caste groups demonstrates that the non-caste movement has increasingly mobilized as a formal political actor. This means that the status of non-caste groups has been transformed into a political actor, a bargaining force with other political groups within the

Indian political system, rather than the status of non-caste movements as an informal actor within the political system (Neil DeVotta, 2010).

### **Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi**

Dr. Ambedkar emerged as a leader for both caste and non-caste groups during the struggle for Indian independence from the British during the colonial era. Three key groups emerged: the first was Mahatma Gandhi, who demanded independence through the principle of "nonviolence" (peaceful means) but wanted to preserve the caste system, citing its uniqueness as a cultural characteristic of India. The second was the Muslim League, which sought independence from Britain and separatism to establish an Islamic state. The third was Dr. Ambedkar, who sought independence from Britain along with the abolition of the caste system and did not want India to be divided.

Another difference of opinion between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar was that during World War II, Mahatma Gandhi wanted India to join the Axis (Germany), arguing that India had sided with Britain in World War I, but that the British had not granted it independence at the end of the war. Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, wanted India to remain independent. India remained on the Allied side (Britain) because it saw the war as a struggle between the fascist dictatorship (Germany) and the liberal democrats (Britain). If the fascist dictatorship won, India would be further swept up in dictatorship. This divergence of views led Mahatma Gandhi to join forces with the Muslim League against Dr. Ambedkar. In 1932, the British Prime Minister allowed representatives from various ethnic minorities in India, including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Europeans, and non-castes.

Mahatma Gandhi went on a hunger strike to protest against non-caste representation, forcing Dr. Ambedkar to compromise. Later, when the caste system in Hindu society was unsuccessful, Dr. Ambedkar led millions of Indians from the Sudra and Dalit castes to renounce Hinduism and convert to Buddhism, vowing to become Buddhists. After British independence was restored to India, The Muslim League, which had been actively pursuing partition (with Mahatma Gandhi having not opposed it from the start), declared its independence and established a new country called "Pakistan." Amidst the chaotic migration of Hindus and Muslims, many were killed and injured. Mahatma Gandhi himself was deeply saddened by the incident. Five months later, he was assassinated by Hindus who strongly opposed the partition of the country.

Dr. Ambedkar was a champion of human rights (particularly for the rights of lower castes and non-castes in India), a fighter for Indian independence, and the first person in modern history

to bring Buddhism back to India. He believed that if India were to reform its society by abolishing the caste system, the return of Buddhism to India was essential.

### **Ambedkar, Architect of the Indian Constitution**

The Indian Constitution was the instrument that led the country to sovereignty, like many other countries that gained independence after the end of World War II. It also serves as a significant symbol of India's remarkable embrace of the diversity inherent in its society. Considering the context of Indian society as a whole, the Indian Constitution is a revolutionary document that transformed the country in many ways, particularly regarding equality in education, religion, land ownership, occupation, and class (Adilan Usama, 2021).

India's Constitution was drafted by the Constituent Assembly, which met for the first time in December 1946. After independence, the Constituent Assembly also served as India's first Legislative Assembly and established a committee to prepare the draft constitution, the Drafting Committee. Ambedkar was invited by the Congress Party to join the cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, as Minister of Justice. He served as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, along with the 296-member Constituent Assembly, the majority of who were from the Congress Party, but also included 29 other members who helped draft the constitution.

As the Chief Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar established the Indian Constitution as a crucial precedent for the creation of a modern Indian society, where all citizens are equal before the law. The Indian Constitution protects the rights and freedoms of all Indians, including religious affiliation, the abolition of the caste system, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on caste, religion, gender, descent, and place of birth. This significant legacy led Ambedkar to be honored as the "Father of the Indian Constitution."

A social structure in the Indian caste system. The status of a group of people is called Dalits, or Untouchables, are classified outside the four castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, and are considered the lowest class of people in Indian society. They are considered untouchable because they are considered to be associated with filth, such as garbage, waste, and animal carcasses. Consequently, they are despised by other castes and avoided.

When the Indian Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950, the Dalits were abolished and the state required all people to be treated equally before the law. This also prohibits discrimination against citizens based on religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth. Under the constitution, any form of discrimination against untouchables, especially by the state, is criminalized. Equal treatment under the law, like that of other castes, grants Dalits

citizenship. He was recognized and given greater prominence in the public sphere. Ambedkar also instituted quotas in the civil service, schools, and universities to provide opportunities for the underprivileged and reduce social inequality. This demonstrated Ambedkar's commitment to the fight for an egalitarian Indian society.

The leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Parliament of India, 2021), who played a key role in drafting the Indian Constitution, and who came from the Untouchable class, took nearly three years to complete. The Indian Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, and came into effect on January 26, 1950. The Constitution lays out comprehensive and comprehensive guidelines and defines the relationships among various organs of governance, from the relationships between various institutions and areas of government, between the legislature, executive, and judiciary, between the central government, state governments, and local governments, between the people and the government, and the relationship between political, social, and economic issues (Bakshi, 2009). The Indian Constitution is considered one of the longest written constitutions in the world, and it is the first and only one still in force today.

### **Restoring Buddhism to the Motherland**

Dr. Ambedkar returned to India and began working as a lawyer at the Bombay High Court in 1924, providing opportunities to advocate for the underprivileged. His activism urged Indian society to recognize the problems of the caste system, alongside his call for independence from the British. He believed that the caste system was an obstacle to the progress of Indian society. On numerous occasions, Ambedkar fought for the rights and freedoms of underprivileged groups. For example, in 1927, Ambedkar performed a satyagraha ceremony, drinking water from the Chowdar pond in Mahad, which was previously off-limits to lower castes. This activism demanded that Dalits have access to the public Chowdar pond. He thus became a leader of the Dalits in their struggle to overthrow the caste system and played a role in the independence movement for India, representing them, along with representatives from other groups, in discussions regarding Indian independence with the British.

This incident made Ambedkar realize that within the framework of Hinduism, there was no way the Dalits could renounce their status, and so he announced his intention to renounce his religion and embrace other religions. Representatives of various religions tried to persuade him, but Ambedkar gently rejected all the offers.

Dr. Ambedkar's repeated disappointments with the abolition of the caste system, as well as his attempts to reconcile the interests of the non-caste and intra-caste groups under his

leadership, from the inception of the non-caste movement, the Round Table Conference (1930-1932), the Poona Pact, and even the constitution of India, have all been met with mixed successes and failures. Finally, in almost every negotiation, Dr. Ambedkar had to yield to the proposals of the Indian National Congress Party, which represented the upper-caste Hindus. However, Dr. Ambedkar's declaration at the non-caste conference (1935) in Yeola, Nashik District, was an attempt to distance himself from Hinduism and its beliefs. It read: Because we are unfortunate enough to call ourselves Hindus and have been treated that way, if we become followers of another religion, no one will treat us in this way. Choose any religion that offers equality in status and practice. It is time for us to rectify our mistakes. I was unfortunate enough to be born with the stigma of being an outcaste. However, it is not my fault, but I will not die as a Hindu, for this is something I have the power to determine.

The above statement demonstrates Dr. Ambedkar's deepest disappointment with the practice of Hinduism, a religion not founded on the principle of equality between human beings. Furthermore, this utterance marked the beginning of the idea of converting one's religion from Hinduism to Buddhism. In 1950, Ambedkar traveled to Sri Lanka to attend a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism. Upon completion, he formally converted to Buddhism. Then in 1954, he traveled to Myanmar to attend the World Fellowship of Buddhists meeting in Rangoon. In 1955, he founded the Buddhist Association of India.

At the Buddhist Jayanti celebrations in Nagpur, Maharashtra, on October 14, 1956, Ambedkar led over 500,000 Dalits in a ceremony to pledge allegiance to Buddhism. He recited the following oath:

"I was born into a Hindu family, but I will die a Buddhist."

As a "fighter for the liberation of the caste system," Ambedkar did his best within the framework of Hinduism. As the "father of the Indian Constitution," Ambedkar ensured equality before the law for all Indians. And as the "revivalist of Buddhism in India," Ambedkar dedicated himself to revitalizing Buddhism in India. Ambedkar's many contributions to the people of India earned him the respect and admiration of many. He is popularly known as "Babasaheb," meaning "father," the enlightened one who led India into the modern era.

Dr. Ambedkar's final work, *Buddha and His Dharma* (1957), was a work that used Pali terminology and interpreted Dr. Ambedkar's Buddhist thought. The significance of Buddha and His Dharma is its rejection of the teachings of Brahmanism. This can be seen in its description of Brahmanism as a religion that promotes inequality and Brahmanism as the

antithesis of equality. Furthermore, the teachings of Brahmanism, which teach people to believe in the Vedas without questioning or disagreeing, cannot be considered true Dharma. Dr. Ambedkar instead took refuge in the teachings of the Buddha, as the great man who disagreed with the Vedas. It can be said that his writing, "Buddha and His Dhamma," was an attempt to revitalize Buddhism in Indian society by presenting Buddhist teachings that blend rationalism, humanism, and universal morality. It was intended to persuade non-caste groups to see Buddhism as an alternative cultural identity.

Importantly, the choice to convert from Hinduism to Buddhism rather than focusing on Christianity and Islam was because Dr. Ambedkar wanted to leave Hinduism but did not want himself and non-caste groups to feel alienated from their Indianess. Three months after his conversion, Ambedkar died suddenly in the early hours of December 6, 1956, ending the life of a caste liberation fighter, the father of the Indian Constitution, and the revivalist of Buddhism in India.

## CONCLUSION

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the first to speak out for the underclass and the underprivileged. He played a leading role in drafting a constitution for social revolution, guaranteeing and protecting civil rights, providing opportunities for the underprivileged, and reducing social inequality. He used reason rather than violence, encouraging cooperation rather than hostility, emphasizing welfare benefits such as education, public health, and fair wages. He emphasized the principle of equality, meaning everyone in society had an equal opportunity to compete.

**Economy and Labor:** He enacted various labor protection laws. In summary, the state should divide land into farms for rent to villagers, providing land for rent regardless of caste, religion, or skin color. The state had a duty to provide capital and production factors, uplifting the economic well-being of the underclass, particularly the poor and land-poor Dalit people or those who labor in factories, enabling them to achieve economic stability and a better life.

**Law:** Dr. Ambedkar called for legislation guaranteeing Dalit rights in politics, establishing a proportionate representation for Dalit people in the political executive, ensuring that Dalit people received equal representation and equal economic status. Social status and educational advancement led the Untouchables in a satyagraha march to use water in a water tank. The goal was not just to secure the water tank, but also to reaffirm the Untouchables' citizenship rights, encouraging them to assert their rights and to form organizations capable of resisting

and challenging injustice. Dr. Ambedkar's Buddhist revival embodied social philosophy of: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. His philosophy emphasized duty and practice when converting to a religion and embracing the Threefold Principle.

His writings, often critical of the caste system in Indian society or opposing the upper castes, primarily expressed his views on issues and proposed solutions for the non-caste community. Dr. Ambedkar also relied on pragmatism through the non-caste movement, including the establishment of various political, social, and cultural institutions, as tools for negotiation with the upper caste community and to improve their quality of life. Dr. Ambedkar's approach differed from the typical demands of the upper caste community in India (nationalists and Hindus).

Furthermore, Dr. Ambedkar's approach was a social struggle for the liberation of the non-caste community. This can be seen in the fact that after India gained independence from British colonial rule, Dr. Ambedkar incorporated protections for non-caste rights into the Indian Constitution. However, this approach proved ineffective. Dr. Ambedkar subsequently proposed that non-caste communities convert from Hinduism to Buddhism. This resulted in the emergence of Neo-Buddhism in Indian society. Religious conversion was seen as a last resort for the non-caste community to escape the suffering caused by the Hindu caste system. Dr. Ambedkar was a Buddhist who adhered to the teachings of Buddhism and fostered peaceful coexistence in society. This can be seen in his role in fighting for the welfare of the untouchables, or the lowest class of people in Indian society. He upheld the principle that all humans should be equal in terms of access to opportunities and rights. He was patient in pursuing education and working on important national duties, enduring the humiliation and despise of being an untouchable. Importantly, he was a man who sacrificed his own interests and dedicated himself to benefiting others, especially Buddhism.

His role in building a peaceful society has had profound effects on Indian society. He has transformed Indians' thinking, beliefs, and practices, leading to acceptance and peaceful coexistence with the Untouchables. He has led political leadership and the revival of Buddhism to promote social justice and equality.

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