

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's Social Philosophy: A Study of Caste, Dalits and Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

Indian society has long been plagued by problems such as caste-based inequalities, untouchability, and social injustice. Against these social evils, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar waged a powerful struggle through his ideas, movements, and constitutional efforts. This research paper aims to provide a sociological analysis of Ambedkar's social thought, specifically clarifying his concept of social justice by understanding the condition of Dalits from a subaltern (marginalized) perspective. This study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based on secondary sources. The research utilizes Ambedkar's major works, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, sociological books, research articles, and government reports. Content analysis, thematic analysis, and historical and comparative methods have been employed for data analysis. The main themes of the study include caste annihilation, social justice, education and empowerment, and the subaltern perspective. The research reveals that Ambedkar considered the caste system to be the fundamental structure of social injustice and deemed its complete abolition essential for the establishment of social justice. He established Dalits not as objects of pity, but as rights-bearing citizens, and empowered them to become active agents of social change through his slogan, "Educate, Agitate, Organize." Ambedkar's concept of social justice is not limited to legal equality alone, but is based on respect, equal opportunities, and a life of dignity. The study concludes that Ambedkar's ideas remain highly relevant in contemporary Indian society due to the persistence of caste discrimination and social inequalities. The true establishment of social justice is possible not merely through laws, but through social consciousness, education, and structural transformation. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar's social thought provides a path towards an egalitarian, just, and humane direction for Indian society.

Introduction

Indian society has long been plagued by caste-based inequalities and social evils like untouchability. It was against these injustices that a great thinker like Bhimrao Ambedkar fought. His philosophy was based on social justice, equality, and human dignity. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in a village near Mhow, Indore. He was born into the Mahar caste, which is considered an untouchable caste in Maharashtra. He was one of the first among India's untouchables to receive such a high level of education. He earned his PhD

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from London University, with his thesis titled "The Problem of the Rupee." In 1923, Ambedkar began practicing law and simultaneously started working for the upliftment of the Dalits. The central theme of Ambedkar's thought was the annihilation of caste. He considered the caste system to be the root cause of inequality and exploitation. He believed that caste was not only a social problem but also a political and moral one, and he emphasized breaking down caste consciousness through education and reason. Ambedkar called caste not a division of labour but a division of labourers, and he rejected its mythological justification, exposing its socio-economic causes. According to him, life without self-respect is meaningless; therefore, the deprived classes should fight for their rights. He advocated for a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. In this research paper, we will attempt to present and verify all of Bhimrao Ambedkar's ideas.

Literature Review

The available literature on Ambedkar establishes him not only as a constitution-maker but also as a profound sociological thinker. Ambedkar himself, in his work 'Annihilation of Caste', identifies the caste system as the biggest obstacle to Indian society and emphasizes the need for its complete eradication (Ambedkar, 1936).

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, compiled by Vasant Moon, provides a detailed analysis of Ambedkar's social, economic, and political ideas. It clarifies that Ambedkar's concept of social justice was not limited to Dalits but was connected to the dignity of all humanity (Ambedkar & Moon, 2003).

According to Srivastava (2007), Ambedkar's struggle was not merely for social reform but a comprehensive democratic project that linked political rights with social equality. Zen (2013) has called Ambedkar a Social Humanist because his thinking was based on human rights, freedom, and moral equality.

Contemporary research shows that the problems of caste-based violence, social exclusion, and inequality still persist in modern India. In this context, Ambedkar's ideas remain highly relevant for social justice and inclusive development today (Rao, 2005; Mallayya, 2006).

Srivastava (2007) argues in his study that Ambedkar's Dalit movement provides a social foundation for Indian democracy.

Ambedkar's major works—Castes in India, The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchable, and Who Were the Shudras? Uncover the historical, social, and economic roots of caste and untouchability. Ambedkar Times highlights that Ambedkar rejected the mythological basis of untouchability, bringing to light its socio-economic causes and considering self-respect as the cornerstone of social liberation.

Ambedkar's major works include (Annihilation of Caste) and 'Who Were the Shudras? And "The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?" analyses the historical and social roots of the caste system. Researchers believe that Ambedkar considered caste to be an oppressive social structure, contrary to the values of equality and democracy. He clarified that the caste system is not a division of labour, but a division of labours.

Sociological perspective

Subaltern means subordination. Caste, gender, age, status, and other such expressions are associated with this term. Both resistance and surrender are feelings linked to it. A sense of position from below is inherent in it. From a subaltern perspective, Bhimrao Ambedkar can be seen as a powerful voice for marginalized communities in Indian society, especially the Dalit, deprived, and excluded classes. Ambedkar adopted a method of viewing social knowledge and history not from above, but "from below," in which the life experiences, suffering, and struggles of the oppressed classes occupy a central place. He established the experiences of these communities not merely as social narratives but as essential social knowledge. Ambedkar's struggle was not limited to social reform; it was an attempt to fundamentally challenge the power structures that perpetuated caste-based inequality and exclusion. Thus, Ambedkar's thought organizes subaltern consciousness at the political, social, and intellectual levels. For this reason, he can be considered a pioneer of subaltern consciousness in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To conduct a sociological analysis of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's social thought.
2. To understand and analyse the condition of Dalits in Indian society from a subaltern perspective.
3. To study the role of Ambedkar's ideas on caste annihilation and social justice.
4. To evaluate the relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in contemporary Indian society.

Relevance of study - This study is important for understanding the contemporary relevance of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's sociological thought. Ambedkar's perspective provides guidance towards the rights, dignity, and empowerment of marginalized and underprivileged sections of society.

Research Methodology -

1. Nature of the Study -

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. This research presents a sociological analysis of Bhimrao Ambedkar's social ideas and their impact on Indian society—particularly on caste-based inequalities and social justice.

2. Research Design -

This study adopts a conceptual and qualitative research design. The objective of the research is to understand Ambedkar's ideas in their historical, social, and constitutional context and to analyze their social impact.

3. Sources of Data - (a) Secondary Data -

This study is primarily based on secondary sources, which include:

- Dr. Ambedkar's original works
- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.

- Sociological books and research papers
- Government reports, textbooks, and journal articles

6. Method of Data Analysis - The collected data has been analysed using a qualitative methodology. The following methods were employed in this analysis:

Content Analysis - Under this method, a systematic study of the content of Dr. Ambedkar's writings, speeches, and selected literature was conducted to understand the core concepts of his ideas.

Thematic Analysis - Through this method, the major themes related to the study were identified, categorized, and analysed.

Historical and Comparative Analysis - Under this method, Ambedkar's ideas were studied in their historical context, and they were compared with contemporary social structures and ideologies.

Main Themes of Analysis -The main themes of analysis in this study were as follows:

- Caste Annihilation
- Social Justice
- Subaltern Perspective
- Dalits

Through these themes, a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Ambedkar's social thought and his contribution to Dalit empowerment have been presented.

Discussion

Dalits- Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's views on Dalits were not merely theoretical, but were shaped by his life experiences and direct encounters. The most impactful example of Dalit oppression is the incident from his childhood when he was not allowed to touch water even when he was thirsty at school. Only the teacher or someone from a higher caste could pour the water; otherwise, he had to remain thirsty. This incident was not just a personal humiliation for Ambedkar, but he considered it a symbol of the inhumanity of the caste-based social structure.

According to Ambedkar, such incidents prove that Dalits were not only deprived of economic or political rights, but also stripped of their human dignity. He described untouchability as a form of social violence that destroys a person's self-respect and social existence. In his words, social humiliation is more painful than any punishment given by the state, because it makes the person "invisible" in society. In response to this inhumane situation of Dalits, Ambedkar led the Mahad Satyagraha (1927), where Dalits agitated to gain the right to drink water from a public water source. This incident was a practical manifestation of Ambedkar's perspective on Dalits. According to him, being denied access to a basic resource like water demonstrates how the caste system excludes Dalits from civil rights. Based on these incidents, Ambedkar concluded that the liberation of Dalits is not possible through reformist appeals alone, but

requires constitutional rights, social awareness, and organized struggle. This is why he saw Dalits not as "objects of pity," but as active agents of social change and gave them the mantra, "Educate, Organize, and Agitate."

Thus, in Ambedkar's views, the Dalit question is not an abstract concept, but a struggle arising from the concrete social realities of life, demanding the establishment of equality, justice, and human dignity. The plight of Dalits is linked to the suppression of their culture, lifestyle, and value system. The most direct basis for this is the lack of respect they receive. This group is also a political entity and, for some, represents an ideology connected to movements and struggles for equality (Zelliot 2001:2002).

Protest against Untouchability- Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar strongly opposed the practice of untouchability prevalent in Hindu society, considering it socially unjust and inhumane. According to him, in the early period, only three varnas (social classes)—Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya—existed in society, while the Shudras originated as a result of internal conflicts between Brahmins and Shudra rulers. Over time, the Brahminical system became dominant in society, and adherence to the rules prescribed by them was considered socially mandatory. The class that did not follow these rules was considered inferior and despised. Ambedkar attempted to demonstrate through historical examples that the system of untouchability had no logical, social, or economic basis. He declared this system completely unacceptable and called it a grave form of social injustice. Ambedkar firmly believed that if Hindu society was to truly progress, the complete eradication of untouchability was essential. Ambedkar did not limit himself to mere theoretical criticism in his fight against untouchability; he also led various movements and practical initiatives to spread public awareness. He emphasized the need for constructive programs and organized campaigns at the social, political, economic, moral, and educational levels to effectively eliminate the practice of untouchability. Thus, Ambedkar's struggle against untouchability emerged as a comprehensive and multifaceted social movement.

Subaltern Group- According to Ambedkar, the subordinate position of Dalits is not a result of any natural or religious order, but rather a historical injustice created by the caste-based social structure. He clarified that the caste system not only deprived Dalits of social and economic resources but also suppressed their voices, identities, and human dignity. Consequently, Dalits remained a "silent subaltern" for a long time, their experiences and suffering unrecognized by society. Ambedkar believed that Brahmanism and Hinduism reinforced each other and perpetuated discrimination in society. He explained the oppression and exploitation inherent in the caste-dominated Indian society. It was said that if a Shudra accidentally heard a scriptural verse or hymn, it was considered an irreligious and sinful act. (Lobo 2001)

Ambedkar's subaltern perspective examined all the systems that originated from the scriptures. In his book "Annihilation of Caste," he wrote that these scriptures were not part of Hinduism but were rather a set of rules based on which the basic life necessities of lower castes were denied, and they were deprived of equal status in society. One aspect of Ambedkar's subaltern perspective is linked to the liberation and empowerment of Dalits. This liberation was also his form of nationalism.

On Social Justice- In Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's social thought, social justice emerges as a central concept. According to Ambedkar, social justice is not merely legal equality, but a process of providing every individual in society with respect, equal opportunities, and a life of dignity. He clarified that the establishment of social justice is impossible as long as the caste-based inequalities prevalent in Indian society persist. Ambedkar considered the caste system to be the fundamental structure of social injustice. According to him, this system not only gives rise to economic and social inequality but also destroys human freedom and self-respect. In "Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar argued that caste is not a division of labor, but a division of laborers, which binds society into a permanent hierarchical structure (Ambedkar, 1936). This perspective presents social justice as a structural problem, not merely a moral or religious question. Ambedkar's approach to social justice is deeply intertwined with constitutional democracy. Through the Indian Constitution, he institutionalized the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. According to him, political democracy cannot be stable unless it is based on social democracy. Social democracy means the actual realization of equality and justice in social life (Ambedkar, 1948). For the establishment of social justice, Ambedkar considered affirmative action an essential tool. He described the reservation policy as a means of bringing historically disadvantaged classes into the mainstream. He believed that the concept of equal opportunity remains incomplete until special protection and opportunities are provided to the weaker sections of society (Government of Maharashtra, 1987). From a subaltern perspective, Ambedkar's thinking on social justice establishes Dalits not as "objects of pity," but as rights-bearing citizens. He called upon Dalits to organize themselves and fight for their rights. His message of "Educate, Agitate, organize" defines social justice as an active and struggle-oriented process. Even in the contemporary context, Ambedkar's perspective on social justice remains highly relevant. Caste discrimination, social exclusion, and unequal opportunities continue to be realities of Indian society today. In this context, Ambedkar's ideas help us understand that social justice is possible not merely through laws, but through social awareness and structural change. Thus, Ambedkar's thinking on social justice provides a guiding intellectual framework for Indian society.

Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates that Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's social thought provides a powerful ideological foundation against the caste-based inequalities, untouchability, and social injustice prevalent in Indian society. Ambedkar considered the caste system to be the root cause of social exploitation and inequality, and deemed its complete eradication essential for the establishment of social justice. The study also reveals that Ambedkar's perspective was not merely theoretical, but deeply rooted in real-life experiences and struggles. He understood the plight of the Dalits from a subaltern (marginalized) perspective and established them not as objects of pity, but as empowered citizens. His message of "Educate, Organize, and Agitate" empowers Dalits to become active agents of social change. Ambedkar's concept of social justice is extremely comprehensive. According to him, social justice means not merely legal equality, but providing every individual with respect, equal opportunities, and a life of dignity. Through the Constitution, he institutionalized the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, and made provisions like reservations a means of empowering historically disadvantaged groups. Even in contemporary Indian society, problems such as caste discrimination, social

exclusion, and unequal opportunities persist. In this context, Ambedkar's ideas remain as relevant today as ever. This study concludes that the true establishment of social justice is possible not only through laws, but also through social consciousness, education, and structural transformation. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar's social thought provides Indian society with an egalitarian, just, and humane direction.

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