

BUILDING AN EQUITABLE NATION: AMBEDKAR'S RESERVATION PHILOSOPHY AND ITS ENDURING RELEVANCE FOR VIKSIT BHARAT @2047

Rahul Yadav

Assistant Professor

Dharmashastra National Law University, Jabalpur, MP

Email:- internship.rahulyadav@gmail.com

Mo:- 6239342240

Dr. Shailesh N Hadli

Professor

Dharmashastra National Law University, Jabalpur, MP



Abstract:

Over the centuries, one concern that have remained indispensable in India's is social justice and equality. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar stands out as one of the main thinkers who shaped these ideals and for his deep critique of caste and his firm commitment to democratic transformation. The ideas of Ambedkar, over the decades have continue to guide contemporary debates on affirmative actions and the reservation policies in India.

Through this paper the author has made an attempt to explores Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice and equality through a detailed analysis of the evolution of India's reservation system. This paper traces the Ambedkar's intellectual critique of caste as a structural system of graded inequality. This paper also examines how his historical experiences, political activism and constitutional involvements shaped Indian reservation policies. This paper analysis his understanding of reservations as tool of compensatory justice, representation and empowerment rather than concessions. The paper also analyses the post-independence developments and judicial decisions to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in addressing modern caste-based inequalities.

1. Introduction

In the modern India, this is undebatable contention that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice, equality stands as one of the most influential intellectual. His vision of social justice and equality emerged not only from his lived experience as a member of a socially ostracised community but also with his deep engagement with political theory, jurisprudence and social reform. Liberty, equality, and fraternity as per Ambedkar were not just abstract ideals. As per him these are the actionable principles which hold significant value for building a democratic civilization free from caste oppression. Ambedkar's contentions for reservations were based on a profound understanding of caste as a structural system of exclusion, and to overcome this exclusion what was required is equally structural remedies. For Ambedkar, reservation was not a concession. For him it was a fundamental Human right which was designed not only to correct historical injustices but also to ensure equal participation for marginalized communities in the public sphere.

2. Ambedkar's Concept of Social Justice

Ambedkar regarded social justice as an indispensable component of a functioning democracy. He contended that it is the caste which has created a system of "graded inequality." It is due to the caste system due to which social status was rigidly determined by birth. For Ambedkar, Social justice means the dismantlement of the institutional, religious and economic foundations that empowered caste hierarchy to Prevail. Ambedkar was extremely influenced

by Lighting ideas, particularly John Dewey's. It was John's interpretation of democracy as a means of allied living, which formed his belief that social justice must guarantee equality and dignity. Therefore, Ambedkar batted for the substantive equality and not mere formal equality recognizing that centuries of discrimination had created wide disparities in access to education, employment, political power, and public resources.

2.1 Historical Background of Ambedkar's Struggle for Equality

For Ambedkar, the fight for equality commenced with his early experiences of discriminations. As he was born into a Mahar family, he faced humiliating treatment in school, denied access to shared spaces and was treated as untouchable in public life. These experiences formed the substance of his understanding that the caste was not simply a social practice but a deeply rooted structure of inequality, and these inequalities were enforced through religion, law and custom. His educational journey from Columbia University to the London School of Economics further refined his analysis of caste as a structural system which required systemic intervention. Experience to constitutionalism and liberal political thought convinced him that India required strong legal safeguards for marginalized communities.

2.2 Ambedkar's Activism Before the Constitution

Ambedkar's struggle for representation of marginalized dates back to decades before the India's independence. He was of the view that political power is very much important & believed that without political power, Dalits will remain socially and economically marginalized forever. Therefore, at the Round Table Conferences (1930–32) he demanded separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.

His contention was that the Dalits could not depend on the upper-caste goodwill for representation because the caste system fundamentally denied equality. The British Communal Award granted the separate electorates to Dalits, but the same was opposed by Gandhi, which lead to the Poona Pact of 1932. Under Poona Pact, seats were reserved for the Dalits instead of separate electorates, although Ambedkar remained critical of the compromise.

2.3 Impact of the Poona Pact on Ambedkar's Thought

The Poona Pact profoundly shaped Ambedkar's later constitutional interventions. It taught him that marginalized communities needed constitutionally guaranteed rights, not political bargains. It strengthened his argument for reservations as a structural necessity to correct historical injustices. The Pact also made him realize that dominant groups would resist any redistribution of political power. These insights guided his later advocacy for reservations in legislatures, public employment, and education.

2.4 Ambedkar's Analysis of Caste as a Structural System

Ambedkar famously described caste as “not merely a division of labour but a division of labourers.” Ambedkar was of the view that the caste created an impermeable hierarchical order in the society. He contended that it is the caste system which has sanctioned discrimination and obstructed social and economic mobility. He argued that based on caste, Occupations were inherited, social relations were predetermined, and inter dining or inter-marriage were forbidden, and all these resulted into absolute exclusion. Ambedkar argued that it is caste system which is destroying fraternity, the moral foundation of democracy. He was of the belief that unless caste was dismantled, equality would remain only formal. Reservation was one of the few tools which could break the prevalent caste based domination and monopoly over education, employment, and political structures.

3. Reservation as an Instrument of Corrective Justice

Ambedkar's justification for reservation was rooted in the principle of compensatory justice. Ambedkar contended that treating the one who are unequal, equally would prolong inequality rather than curtailing it. Therefore, he was of the view that the state shall provide differential treatment to the one who belong to marginalized groups to correct historical wrongs, which they have faced over the years. Ambedkar was of the belief that reservation will ensure the adequate representation, opened access to opportunities for the marginalized and mitigated the disadvantages caused by caste-based exclusion which have prevailed over the centuries. He contended that reservation is not a charity but as a constitutional right necessary for achieving substantive equality. In his writings, he repetitively stressed that the Dalits will remain outside positions of power and influence without reservation.

3.1 Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly

Ambedkar played a vital role in shaping constitutional provisions on equality. Articles 14, 15, 16, and 17 of the Constitution of India bear the imprint of his thinking. Article 16(4), which explicitly allows reservations in public employment for “backward classes,” represents the insistence of Ambedkar. It was made sure through these provisions that the state must intervene to level the playing field. Ambedkar in the constituent assembly debates explained why formal equality would not be sufficient in a society which is fractured by caste. He contended that unless the one who belong to oppressed classes are not being provided with the genuine access to education and employment, the democracy would become a mere façade. Ambedkar also made sure that not only in employment but reservation shall also be there in political system. He made sure that there exist political reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in legislatures, recognizing representation as essential to empowerment.

4. Ambedkar's Philosophy of Representation

Representation lay at the heart of Ambedkar's political philosophy. He was of the belief that true unless there is no participation from all the groups, especially those historically oppressed there cannot be true democracy. From his this conviction only his earlier demand for Separate electorates stemmed. Although he has to compromise on his original demand of separate electorate because Gandhi opposed it but he, maintained that reservations were necessary to secure meaningful representation. Ambedkar was of the view that representation shall not only be numerical but also required to be symbolic. He contended that reservation restored dignity and created a psychological shift among the one who belongs to the marginalized communities. According to him, reservations in public employment made sure that state establishments reflect the India's social diversity.

4.1 Ambedkar's Economic Philosophy and Reservations

Economic thoughts of Ambedkar have been often gone unnoticed. His economic philosophy formed a critical part of his philosophy of social justice. He was of the view that caste functions not only as a social hierarchy but also as an economic system that restricted occupational mobility and access to resources. That was the reason why his proposals for state socialism, nationalization of key industries, and labour protections were aimed at reducing economic inequalities created by caste. He believed that reservation in employment is a tool to democratize economic opportunities and break the prevailing upper-caste monopolies. Ambedkar was of the view that without economic justice, political and social justice would remain impossible.

5. Post-Independence Evolution of Reservation Policy

The reservation policies have evolved over the years after the Independence of India and are well guided by Ambedkar's principles. The Constitution granted reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes not only in legislatures but also in public employment and educational institutions. The reservation was also extended through the recommendations of Mandal Commission for Other Backward Classes, which were implemented in 1990. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of Indra Sawhney upheld OBC reservations and also introduced the concept of creamy layer. Although it is true that OBC reservations were never explicitly addressed by the Ambedkar, but his broad framework of social justice supports affirmative measures for all socially and educationally backward classes.

6. Creamy Layer and Sub-Classification Debate

Recent Judgements of the Hon'ble Supreme court of India, especially State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh, have addressed on the issue of sub-categorization within. Ambedkar in his writings had recognized inequalities even within Dalit communities but contended that caste

stigma applied broadly. Ambedkar might have supported prioritizing the most marginalized but would likely have never accepted the idea of reducing backwardness to purely economic criteria. Ambedkar through his writings has stressed that caste discrimination persists and these discriminations as per him were irrespective of income mobility, making caste a distinct axis of oppression requiring structural remedies.

7. Reservations in Education: Ambedkar's Priority

One thing was central to the Ambedkar's social reform agenda and that was education. He was of the belief that education was very essential for liberation from the prevailing caste based dominations. Through the motto "Educate, Agitate, Organize," Ambedkar promoted the idea that education equips marginalized communities with tools for liberation. To expand the access of education for the marginalized he advocated for the hostels, scholarships, and reservations in higher education for Dalits. Ambedkar was of the belief that Dalits representation in professions such as law, medicine, and civil service, society are must, and without this the society will remain structurally unequal.

7.1 Reservations in Employment and Social Dignity

Ambedkar was of the view that public employment is an instrument for ensuring dignity and empowerment. Dalits were confined to degrading, low-paid occupations due to caste restrictions for centuries. He was of the view that reservation in public employment enabled access to secure jobs, status, and opportunities, which were previously denied to the one who belongs to marginalized groups. Ambedkar was of the belief that reservation is essential for democratising the state apparatus, as it had excluded marginalized communities in the past. He was of the view that employment not only offered economic benefits but also challenged the centuries old caste prejudices by placing Dalits in positions of authority.

8. Critiques of Reservation and Ambedkar's Response

Reservations has been criticized a lot and it is contended that it undermines merit but Ambedkar rejected this claim. He contended that "merit" is socially constructed and shaped by access to resources, privilege, and opportunity. He was of the view that upper-caste dominance in education and employment was a result of historical privilege not mere superior merit. Another criticism is that reservations perpetuate caste identity and the amedkar countered this too. He contended that caste system prevails because society continues to discriminate based on caste, not because the state provides remedies. He was of the view that until caste-based inequalities are eliminated, the reservations must continue.

9. Continuing Relevance of Ambedkar's Vision

It has been 7 decades since the remedies are provided through the constitution of india, but despite these legal advances, the caste discrimination still persists in education,

employment, and social interactions. The ideas and principles of Ambedkar's continue to guide contemporary policies on affirmative action and substantive equality. His views and criticism of caste remains pertinent to understand that why reservations remain necessary. His insistence on combination of legal reform, social transformation and economic justice provides a powerful framework for addressing the prevailing inequalities.

10. Conclusion

Viksit Bharat is the vision of the Government of India under the able leadership of the Prime Minister of India. But the same cannot be fulfilled if there remains inequality even at the last count of approximately 150 crore Indians. To become vikshit, one of the most important resources of this universe, i.e., human resources because of their intellectual capacity, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and analytical abilities shall be free from any kind of discrimination due to caste. Though it has been more than seven decades since reservation was implemented, there remain disparities based on caste. Till the time it exists even in the last home of India, no nation can be developed.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's constitutional philosophy remains intensely relevant as India moves toward the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047, a vision, Viksit Bharat is a vision that aspires to build a socially just, economically advanced, and constitutionally grounded nation. Ambedkar was of the view that a nation which is divided by system of caste hierarchy can never achieve genuine progress unless historical injustices are addressed through structural reforms. His insistence on substantive equality, rather than formal equality, becomes critical for India's developmental trajectory. Because the caste based decimation still persist and these disparities still shape access to education, public employment, and socio-economic mobility.

Ambedkar's viewed reservations as an instrument of corrective justice, representation, and democratization and it continues to hold immense value for 2047, especially in light of widening opportunity gaps. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to face layered disadvantages in literacy, land ownership, government representation, and private-sector participation despite considerable progress,. Therefore reservation remains a cornerstone policy that ensures participation of historically excluded communities in governance and nation-building and it is an indispensable requirement for a Viksit Bharat.

Furthermore, the new forms of exclusion in digital access, skill development, higher education competitiveness, and technology-driven economies must also be address. Ambedkar would have argued that emerging inequalities, such as digital divides and algorithmic biases, must also be approached through the lens of social justice, ensuring that development does not give birth to the new hierarchies.

As India approaches 2047, Ambedkar's political philosophy also induces the future policymakers to protect reservations from populist distortion or dilution. The pressures to weaken affirmative action, whether through economic only criteria, arbitrary caps, or erosion of representation, must be resisted in order to maintain the integrity of constitutional equality. Ambedkar was of the view that caste is not merely an economic disadvantage but a deeply embedded social stigma and it requires legal safeguards until genuine equality is achieved.

In the journey toward *Viksit Bharat @2047*, Ambedkar's message becomes clear i.e. Economic development without social justice is incomplete development. India cannot become a truly advanced nation by 2047 if even a smallest segment of its population remains marginalized. The reservation system thus continues to be a vital tool not only to democratize opportunities but also to deepen participation and foster nation-building rooted in dignity and equality. Ambedkar's vision reminds us that a socially cohesive, caste-free, and inclusive India is not only a constitutional promise but a prerequisite for a fully *Viksit Bharat*.

