

**Towards Viksit Bharat@2047: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's
Constitutional Vision and Its Enduring Relevance 26 Nov 2025**

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Abstract:

This paper explores the transformative role of foreign travel in shaping the intellectual and moral vision of Dr. Ambedkar. His journeys - undertaken during a period when mobility beyond one's caste and region was extremely restricted—represent a remarkable quest for knowledge, exposure, and social uplift. Drawing from the wider 19th–20th-century tradition of educational and cultural travel by Indian reformers, this study situates Ambedkar mobility as both a personal act of self-formation and serious attempt for intellectual empowerment.

1. Introduction:

Travel has long been a transformative act—reshaping identities, opening intellectual horizons, and enabling individuals to challenge the limits of geography, tradition, and social constraints. For Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, travel was not merely movement across physical spaces but a profound pursuit of knowledge, exposure, and social awakening. His journeys, particularly during a period when travel from India to global centres of learning was limited to the privileged few, represent a remarkable narrative of aspiration and intellectual courage. This paper examines Dr. Ambedkar's travel as a symbolic and practical quest for knowledge, studying how his mobility beyond borders shaped his worldview and persona, enriched the socio-educational foundations of his family, and influenced the intellectual climate that later nurtured.

By foregrounding the relationship between overseas travel, learning, and social reform, this paper situates Ambedkar journeys within the larger 19th–20th century tradition of educational mobility undertaken by Indian thinkers, reformers, and early modern travellers. The focus is not merely historical but interpretive—reading travel as an act of self-creation, resistance, and visionary determination.

2. Childhood and the desire to travel

Ambedkar belonged to a socially marginalised background where mobility—geographical or educational—was limited by caste-based discrimination. Yet his intellectual appetite transcended all hurdles which he faced at domestic front and at educational levels. Higher education became an ambition and with it the fervent desire to get a chance to study at the highest echelons of education. In those pre-world-wars days when Ambedkar graduated from the Elphinstone college, Mumbai very few Indians aspired or afforded to go abroad for educational studies. Those who went were mostly on government or philanthropic scholarships which had to be earned.

3. Youthful aspiration of higher studies at the best foreign Universities

During the late 19th century, educational and professional travel among Indians often centred on military postings, colonial bureaucratic positions, or scholarly pursuits.

One can assume with surety that his early experiential travels in rural Maharashtra and to other places within India had acquainted him with differing social conditions, cross-regional cultures, economic challenges, diverse and often contradictory evolving social norms, caste dynamics, and doctrine.

Ambedkar's values were not abstract ideas; they were lived philosophies. When young Bhimrao Ambedkar showed extraordinary curiosity and aptitude, his father supported his aspirations—even when society sought to confine him. He understood that the world beyond India's borders held greater opportunities for rigorous academic training and encouraged his son to embrace those possibilities.

Travel especially overseas, for him, became a means to escape inherited constraints and to construct an identity anchored in scholarship, discipline, and ethical progress. This geographical plurality seeded an understanding that the world was far larger, more complex, and more connected than the confines which a traditional society suggested. Travel thus became the first classroom in a lifelong pursuit of learning.

4. Travel as a device of learning life, culture, and the moral Journey

For Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, physical journeys were inseparable from moral, ethical, and educational journeys. The 19th-century intellectual climate, shaped by reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Swami Vivekananda, Raja Rammohan Roy, and other visionaries, emphasised knowledge as the key to self-liberation. Travel—especially travel motivated by study and observation—was not seen as a luxury but as a sacred responsibility for those who aspired to uplift their communities. This mobility shaped his broad-mindedness and deepened his conviction that knowledge—rather than birth—determines human worth. This, broadened perspective allowed him to cultivate a progressive mindset that later influenced his parenting philosophy.

Notably, his insistence on English education for the future generation of India - at a time when few families from oppressed castes considered it—was directly shaped by what he had witnessed during his travels. The inherent unfriendliness to the 'other' or foreign language disappears. He observed that the wider world operated through literacy, mobility, and intellectual exchange, and that only education could equip an individual to participate in that world.

Thus, travel for Ambedkar was not a mere temporary displacement. It was a pedagogical journey—a conscious effort to observe, learn, and apply knowledge for the betterment of future generations.

5. Ambedkar Vision: Travel as Social Empowerment

Travel beyond borders, the paper focuses on how overseas travel became central to Ambedkar's worldview. His relentless efforts of learning and mobility can be understood as an extension of his own personal journey.

He believed that:

- Education is the vehicle of social mobility.
- Travel provides an exposure to diverse cultures and fosters intellectual independence.
- Travel destroys ignorance, prejudice, and inherited limitations.
- Knowledge gathered from the world must be directed to enrich the community.

This value of travel and learning became foundational to the intellectual evolution of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who got a chance to study at Columbia University, London School of Economics, and Gray's Inn. His journeys—both literal and symbolic—directly influenced one of the greatest scholarly journeys in Indian history.

6. Travel in the Larger Historical Context

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's story gains its fullest meaning when placed against the backdrop of global educational travel in the early 20th century. During this period:

- Students from India were beginning to travel abroad for higher education.
- During the period 1901 to 1945 Colonial infrastructures made travel possible, but it was difficult and expensive and could be availed by very few people.
- The entrenched social stigma of caste and class barriers restricted such mobility to a privileged few.
- Exposure to international academic spaces transformed returning scholars into reformers.

Ambedkar encouragement of transnational travel for academic excellence shows remarkable foresight. The idea that an Indian from an oppressed caste and background could journey across oceans to earn multiple doctorates was revolutionary. This vision echoes the broader narrative of global travel writing: crossing borders becomes an assertion of selfhood and a reclaiming of intellectual dignity.

In travel writing traditions, the journey often becomes a metaphor for transformation. In Ambedkar's life, travel symbolised defiance against social stagnation, it became the foundation for constitutional thought, comparative sociology, economics, and global human rights philosophy.

7. Intellectual Legacy of a Traveller-Ambedkar

The legacy of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's travels extends far beyond his lifetime. His exposure to diverse regions nurtured:

- Rational thinking
- Secular values
- Respect for education
- Commitment to equality and justice

These values imbibed at foreign educational institutions and in a foreign country formed the environment in which Dr. B.R. Ambedkar grew intellectually. In later years 1930-32 he even attended the Round Table conferences in London as an Indian govt delegate. The cosmopolitan worldview that shaped the architect of the Indian Constitution was rooted in the experiences, discipline, and vision of a father who believed deeply in the power of learning acquired beyond borders.

Travel became a catalyst in shaping understanding of social systems, gender equality, and a motivation for connecting India with the world and connecting personal ambition with collective upliftment of the then society and change the prevalent and deeply entrenched value system.

8. Conclusion

Dr. Ambedkar's travel story is one of courage, vision, and relentless pursuit of knowledge. In an era when mobility was a privilege, he used travel as a tool of transformation—broadening his own understanding of the world and laying the foundation for his exceptional academic and intellectual journey. His travels were not merely physical movements; they were philosophical acts, symbolic crossings of social boundaries, and testament to the belief that learning must be expansive and borderless.

Through this lens, we see his journeys not as isolated biographical details but as pivotal chapters in the making of modern India's greatest thinker. Travel beyond borders became both a personal quest and a generational inheritance—one that reshaped the intellectual destiny of a nation.

By reading travel as a metaphor for boundary-crossing—both literal and social—this paper interprets Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's journeys as acts of intellectual courage and quiet resistance. His mobility laid the foundation for an environment rooted in rationality, equality, and global awareness.

This pursuit of knowledge beyond borders helped shape the cosmopolitan worldview of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whose scholarship and constitutional vision transformed modern India. This study highlights how Dr. Ambedkar's travels catalysed one of the most significant scholarly journeys in Indian history, reaffirming the transformative power of travel in generating social change, intellectual liberation, and intergenerational empowerment.

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