

## **Dr B.R. Ambedkar's View on Untouchability**

**Darshana Ashok Bhalerao and Dr. Sandesh M. Wagh\***

Department of History, Kalina Campus, University Of Mumbai, Mumbai, Maharashtra  
400098, India

### **ABSTRACT**

The stance of Dr B.R. Ambedkar on untouchability (which is discussed in this essay) is one of the most comprehensive and radical critiques of caste-based exclusion in the modern Indian social philosophy. Dr Ambedkar dismissed the moralistic and reformist theory in favour of the concept of untouchability as a result of historical developments, institutional preservation based on economic deprivation, spatial division, religious dogma, and coercive social practices. The study, based primarily on the writings of Dr. Ambedkar, explores his diagnosis of untouchability as a complete social fact and how he subverted concepts of purity and filth based on birth, like in the scriptures and Brahmanical orthodoxy.

The essay goes further to discuss the all-round solutions Dr Ambedkar suggests to terminate untouchability, legislative enforcement, political mobilisation, constitutional safeguards, and an ethical-religious breakthrough, conversion into Buddhism. It argues that despite its acute realism in realising the constraints of legal reform, in the absence of social and political power, the approach of Dr. Ambedkar offers an integrated model of social change that combines law, institutions and collective agency. By evaluating how the concept continues to have relevance in the context of persistent caste bias in contemporary India, the study takes into consideration the enduring relevance of the concept of social justice, democracy, and human rights as developed by Dr. Ambedkar in his work.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Untouchability is one of the most long-standing and entrenched forms of social exclusion in South Asia, which over centuries has determined the hierarchies of status, access, and dignity. It has been a systemic practice of space, labour, ritual participation, and civic rights as opposed to a residual social prejudice. Dr. The most comprehensive and intransigent critique of untouchability ever written by an Indian intellectual of the modern age was given by B.R. Ambedkar, who regarded it as a historically constructed and institutionally sustained apparatus of control and not a vice or cultural anomaly.

Dr. Ambedkar is unique in his analysis as it was created under the influence of a certain positionality. He was a victim of caste exclusion and lived with the experience of untouchability; being a modern scholar who received education in the field of political philosophy, economics and law, he analysed it critically and comparatively. Thanks to such a

dual view, he could construct a structural understanding of caste oppression and go beyond reformist sympathy. His activities influenced much on the public debate on equality, rights and social justice and Scheduled Caste politics and constitutional amendments in independent India.

The present paper examines the views of Dr. Ambedkar regarding untouchability with two objectives in mind, with the first one being to analyse his diagnosis of factors, line of reasoning, and machinery of untouchability; the second being to look at the solutions that he proposed to the issue, which encompass political activism, religious reform, and legal safeguards. Most of the work relies on the writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar, but these works are viewed as a whole body of social and political ideas rather than mere historical sources.

The other studies done on Dr. Ambedkar have highlighted a number of aspects of his thoughts. He is mostly depicted by some scholars as an extreme opponent of Brahmanical Hinduism with his cry of conversion and denial of scripture. His devotion to legal equality and institutional reform is also emphasised by others as a constitutionalist. More recent studies have underlined the current importance of the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar and have discussed the aspects of caste, space, and social exclusion. It is based on this literature that the current study is introduced as a conceptual interpretation of the writings of Dr Ambedkar, particularly the strategic and policy-based facet of his ideas and their continued applicability. The qualitative and interpretive research methodology has a close textual analysis-based approach. Dr. The speeches by Ambedkar, his essays and political works are some examples of the primary sources; the examples of the secondary sources are peer-reviewed academic publications and research work in history. The premise of the analysis on the social exclusion theory and a legal-institutional analysis makes it possible to conduct an integrated study of the diagnosis of untouchability and the prescriptive solutions Dr. Ambedkar offered to counter the vice. It is in this style that the paper will endeavor to demonstrate the enduring analytical strength and moral significance of the vision developed by Dr. Ambedkar to deal with the caste-based injustice.

## **2. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Diagnosis of Untouchability**

The diagnosis of untouchability by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the most acute criticisms of caste-based exclusion in modern social theory. Dr. Ambedkar considered untouchability as a system of domination created in the past by religious teachings, space, and economic deprivation, institutionalised coercion as compared to reformist approaches that considered it

a moral abnormality or a social bias. His research discovered untouchability in some of the historical, material and normative processes, and it opposed metaphysical interpretations.

### ***Untouchability as a Historical and Social Construction***

In his words, Untouchability is not a division of labour, but a social stigma that is imposed artificially. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar divided into two groups: whether untouchability was a congenital condition or a socially appointed social structure. In his view, the concept of untouchable communities of people had no rational and empirical basis and was historically and artificially constructed [1]<sup>1</sup> According to Dr Ambedkar, the concept of untouchable communities of people was irrational and empirically baseless.

By scrutinising Indian early social history, Dr. Ambedkar was able to connect the emergence of untouchability to certain ritual, political and social developments. He demonstrated in *Who Were the Shudras?* that the caste divisions did not start as fixed categories but rather accumulated over time through conflict over social privileges and ritual status [2]. He argued that untouchability was a more radical and later development, a consequence of the solidification of social demarcations and the concentration of Brahmanical authority.

Dr. Ambedkar confronted the caste system based on filth and purity directly with moral reasoning of the caste system, where he criticised filth and purity as rigid in terms of birth. He argued that the belief that social status or moral worthiness could be determined by birth was contrary to fundamental justice and sanity. He also wrote in *Annihilation of Caste* that caste was not merely a division of labour, but a division of labourers, one above the other [3]. The worst form of this graded inequality was untouchability, which prohibited whole populations from civic, religious and social life.

By redefining the origins of the caste system, Dr. Ambedkar disproved the belief that the concept of untouchability was a permanent part of Indian culture. Instead, he ensured that it was well understood that it was a contingent social institution that could be destroyed through the influence of human action, since it was created and maintained.

### ***Religious Sanction and Scriptural Authority***

An important aspect of the diagnosis by Dr. Ambedkar was the understanding of the religious texts as they were used to defend untouchability. He strictly studied the Dharmashastras and Smriti texts, in particular *Manusmriti*, which were the documents that gave social inequality and ritual exclusion the status of law [4]. Dr. Ambedkar considered that untouchability could not be perceived as a simple social practice; but, in fact, it was an institution approved by religion and was enshrined in the frameworks of Hindu norms. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar argued that social prejudice was transformed into a moral duty by the religious authority.

He posited that such sacralisation of hierarchy made untouchability beyond normal social transformation. You cannot make anything out of the principles of caste, he argued. A country cannot be constructed, as morality cannot be constructed [5]. More importantly, Dr. Ambedkar did not agree that it was possible to reform Hinduism internally without sacrificing its scriptural base. He argued that weak solutions that ignored the strength of discriminatory texts would never do. According to him, caste and untouchability would be there as long as the Dharmashastras were observed. This led him to advocate an intellectual severance with Brahmanical orthodoxy as well as reinterpretation.

To Dr. Ambedkar, the need for rupture extended beyond theology to the legal and the political arena. Secular laws, constitutional morality and moral re-conversion were forced to fight against religious sanction. The fact that he demanded a modern legal system that was based on equality and human dignity, thus could not be disconnected from the fact that he was critiquing the bible.

### ***Spatial, Economic, and Social Mechanisms of Exclusion***

Dr. Ambedkar did not restrict his diagnosis of untouchability to philosophy but used empirical data from everyday social life. He emphasised that untouchability worked through systematic social control, economic deprivation and spatial isolation. Untouchable communities were not allowed to use communal resources, were required to live outside the village boundaries, and had minimal movements in community areas [6]. Spatial segregation was an inherent part of untouchability as opposed to an accident, as argued by Dr. Ambedkar. The economic marginalisation further stipulated this exclusion. The untouchables were not allowed to own land, had to work at low-paying, dehumanising jobs and were not allowed access to skilled labour and education. As explained by Dr. Ambedkar, caste became a regime of constant insecurity because social humiliation was inevitable because of economic dependency [7].

The societal control measures ensured that this directive was adhered to. The unofficial methods of punishment included social boycotts, ritual humiliation and exclusion, which were effective. Efforts to resist or move were threatened every time by physical and symbolic violence. The theory presented by Dr. Ambedkar presaged sociological findings of the future by demonstrating how caste reproduced itself via everyday practice as opposed to legislation or religion alone.

The diagnosis by Dr. Ambedkar was unique in the sense that it focused on the links between ideology, space, economy, and power. He argued that prejudice was not the cause of

untouchability but an order in society that was well preserved to benefit dominant groups. Thus, it could only be eliminated by structural change instead of moral persuasion.

### **3. Dr. Ambedkar's Prescriptions: Strategies for Eradication**

Once he was diagnosed with the disease, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar got engaged in his fight against untouchability, and thus, a carefully designed plan of changing a society was generated. His suggestions were not ensconced in austerity or in utopia. Instead, they were a stern realism founded in political confrontation, constitutional argument and historical practice. Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that a concerted effort that entailed constitutional legislation, legislative action, political action, and, when needed, decisive ethical rupture with religious custom that supported inequality was required to bring an end to untouchability. He felt that it was not possible to do so on goodwill or a reformist appeal.

#### ***Constitutionalism and Fundamental Rights***

Dr. Ambedkar considers constitutionalism as the most viable modern means of reversing the old social exclusionary systems. During his tenure as Chairman of the Draughting Committee, he sought to transform the Indian Constitution into a normative system that would be able to restructure social relationships. Dr. Instead of being a legal text, Ambedkar viewed the Constitution as a form of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience, founded on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity [8]. Dr. Ambedkar felt that the removal of untouchability in Article 17 in its explicit form was the moral and legal rejection of decades of officially approved banishment. Since the constitution prohibits untouchability in its various forms,

Dr. Ambedkar made sure that caste discrimination was a breach of fundamental rights rather than a matter of custom or belief [9]. The preservation of civil freedoms and equality before the law (Article 14) was designed to ensure the legal personality of people who had previously been denied social acknowledgement. When disconnected from social and political reality, Dr. Ambedkar saw the limitations of constitutional protections. "*However good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it happen to be a bad lot,*" he warned in his farewell address to the Constituent Assembly [10]. He maintained that constitutional law and constitutional morality have to coexist. Legal equality could remain purely formal in the absence of social commitment and political vigilance.

#### ***Legislative Action and Enforcement***

Dr. Ambedkar stressed the need for particular legislative measures to convert rights into enforceable claims, realising that constitutional ideas needed to be operationalised. To end

commonplace untouchability practices, laws controlling access to public areas, water sources, educational institutions, and jobs were crucial. Dr. Ambedkar had always insisted that there can be nothing like rights without remedies [11]. Legislative intervention was highly important to fight against discrimination that occurred in the local and informal scope. Criminal actions against exclusion, social boycotts and denial of services were necessary to prevent violence of the dominant castes and ensure accountability. Dr. Ambedkar remained sceptical, however, regarding the idea that transformation in society could be brought about by legislation alone. He cautioned that enforcement requires judicial sensitivity, administrative will and above all, social pressure below.

The fact that Dr. Ambedkar always believed that society must be ready to take legal reforms is a sign of his realism. He observed that the strong caste interests often played around with or refused to comply with progressive policies [12]. Acts were thus required, but not enough; they must be incorporated within a bigger scheme of political empowerment and social awakening.

### ***Political Organisation and Mass Mobilisation***

Dr Ambedkar considered political power the key to all other forms of emancipation. He insisted that the downtrodden would never have to depend on the state's fairness or the goodwill of influential quarters. Instead, they were forced to come together as a self-governing political body and defend their rights. He stated that "the key to all social progress is political power" [13]. Dr. Ambedkar famously encouraged the oppressed to "educate, agitate, and organise," emphasising that education is the cornerstone of political consciousness. Education was emancipatory as well as instrumental, allowing for critical analysis of inherited structures of subordination. To make constitutional promises a reality, collective action—whether via political parties, labour unions, or social movements—was required.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that without organised social agency, the law was ineffective. Through persistent political battle, rights have to be asserted, protected, and institutionalised. His belief that assimilationist politics weakened the voice of the underprivileged led him to support separate political representation and, subsequently, robust protections for the Scheduled Castes [14]. Therefore, political mobilisation was essential to his fight against untouchability rather than

### ***Ethical and Religious Break: Conversion to Buddhism***

Dr. Ambedkar's appeal for a moral and religious break with Hindu tradition was his most radical recommendation. He concluded that caste and untouchability were ingrained in Hindu

religious philosophy after decades of trying to change it through criticism and law. His rejection of scriptural authority that approved of inequality was dramatised by symbolic actions like the public burning of the Manusmriti [15]. In the end, Dr. Ambedkar concluded that Hinduism could not transform. Along with hundreds of thousands of others, he formally converted to Buddhism in 1956, which was a collective gesture of emancipation. Dr. Ambedkar believed that Buddhism provided a moral world based on social equality, compassion, and reason. According to him, it is "a religion which teaches liberty, equality, and fraternity" [16].

It was social and political, but also a spiritual conversion. It allowed marginalised groups that were historically sidelined to claim their dignity as equal moral subjects and reconstruct their identities beyond the caste system. Dr. Conversion was the way of creating a new social consciousness by which Ambedkar hoped to maintain the struggle against untouchability, which would not become entangled with legal systems.

#### **4. Discussion: Evaluation of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Approach**

It is interesting to note in the annals of social change that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played a significant role in fighting against untouchability, not only in terms of the moral response but also in terms of the strategic soundness and layering richness of the response. Dr Ambedkar's As opposed to the views of reformist or nationalist approaches, which regarded caste discrimination as the remnant of social backwardness, untouchability was a complete social reality, which was intellectual, institutional, economic, and also spatial in nature, as envisioned by Ambedkar. This part is the critical assessment of the strength, tension, and long-term importance of the approach of Dr. Ambedkar through the lens of its integrated nature, its awareness of structural constraints and its demand for political assertion instead of assimilation.

##### ***An Integrated Model of Social Transformation***

One of the most striking features of the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar is that it has integrated ideas, organisations and human agency into just one framework in the process of social change. Dr. Ambedkar did not favour either of the areas. Instead, he argued that social liberation required a conjunctive reorganisation of institutional structures (law and the state), normative conceptions (faith and morality) and collective action (political mobilisation). On an intellectual level, Dr. Ambedkar began a steady assault on religious ideologies that propagated injustice. He was unrivalled in his belief in constitutionalism and law at the institutional level.

He emphasised political power, organisation and education among the oppressed at the agency level. This association is facilitated by the fact that he emphasised that liberty, equality and fraternity were interdependent requirements of social democracy and not abstract concepts [17]. Unless there is at the bottom of it social democracy, he argued, political democracy cannot be sustained [18]. Dr. Ambedkar's discussion of the material and symbolic aspects of untouchability is equally important. He was equally aware of material realities like landlessness, occupational confinement, and geographical segregation as he questioned the metaphorical violence inherent in ideas of purity and pollution. Dr. Ambedkar's approach is consistent with later sociological and critical theories of social exclusion because of this dual focus, which sets him apart from solely moral critics of caste [19].

Comparatively speaking, Dr. Ambedkar's strategy might be characterised as constitutional radicalism. Dr. Ambedkar considered the constitution as a tool for social transformation, in contrast to liberal constitutionalists who saw it as a neutral framework. However, he aimed to radicalise legal institutions from inside, in contrast to revolutionary traditions that disapproved of them. In contemporary political theory, this combination of social liberation and constitutionalism is still rather rare [20].

### ***Structural Limits and Continuing Exclusion***

The continuation of caste-based exclusion in post-independence India underscores the structural constraints that Dr. Ambedkar himself foresaw, notwithstanding the framework's revolutionary aspirations. The social eradication of untouchability did not always follow from its legal prohibition. Dalit groups' lived experiences are nevertheless shaped by caste violence, informal discrimination, and spatial marginalisation, especially in rural and semi-urban areas [21]. This is one of the prospects that Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar had in mind. He frequently advised that laws can be undermined by administrative apathy and social prejudice. In his farewell speech to the Constituent Assembly, he cautioned against naively relying on constitutional forms without developing constitutional morality [22]. He was right when he predicted this would happen because the caste traditions have continued despite legislative safeguards.

Moreover, untouchability has proved to be adaptive to more changing social situations. In the background of residential segregation, educational discrimination, and labour market exclusion, subtle processes that perpetuate inequality are underway, although blatant forms of exclusion might be on the rise. The fact that groups are excluded by means of not only legislation, but also through everyday social processes embedded within geography and

economy, as B notes, is proven by the recent studies concerning caste and place [23]. All these disadvantages never negate the methodology used by Dr. Ambedkar; it only reaffirms his argument that the law must go hand in hand with societal awareness and the constant political effort. Therefore, his theory presents an essential ground to understand why liberation is not a complete answer but a never-ending process.

### ***Political Assertion versus Assimilation***

Perhaps the most disputable aspect of his methodology is the opposition of Dr. Ambedkar towards assimilationist practices. Dr. Ambedkar felt that the efforts at gradually integrating the untouchables into the Hindu social structure by seeking to reform and appeal to the moral values included in the Hindus were fundamentally flawed. He maintained that assimilation, in the absence of structural reform, just replicated hierarchy under a more benign façade. Dr. Ambedkar believed that power, not persuasion, was the foundation for social transformation, which is why he insisted on an independent Dalit political organisation. He noted that "*the history of India is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism*" [24]. This was a political diagnosis more than just a historical assertion: privilege is rarely voluntarily given up by dominant groups.

Debates in Dalit studies and democratic philosophy are still fuelled by the conflict between political assertion and reformist inclusion. Dr. Ambedkar's stance was unambiguous: autonomous collective power was the only way to attain equality and dignity, not favouritism or moral sympathy. He was very different from Gandhian methods to caste transformation in that he preferred structural solutions above moral exhortation [25]. Dr. Ambedkar reframed untouchability as a matter of rights and power rather than altruism or social peace by emphasising political assertion. This is still one of his most enduring contributions, serving as a reminder to modern movements that organised opposition, institutional leverage, and ethical critique are all necessary for emancipation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This essay has examined the theory by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar that untouchability is not a natural, religiously dictated, and irreducible state of social exclusion, but is a form of social exclusion created and preserved through the structural framework. The diagnosis by Dr. Ambedkar held that untouchability was based on interrelationships such as in the religious doctrine, spatial segregation, economic hardship and social enforcement, all of which served to deny some groups of people their rights, dignity and capacity to enjoy full participation in the society. Dr Ambedkar's views of untouchability as a moral failure were transformed by

Ambedkar into the issue of power and institutionalised injustice through deconstructing the illusion of purity by birth and disclosing the historical fabrication of caste hierarchy.

This essay has delved into the fact that the concept of untouchability is a historically created and structurally maintained system of exclusion as opposed to a natural, socially mandated or religiously mandated and socially immutable social state discussed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar concluded that untouchability was a result of the intersecting realms of religious teaching, spatial segregation, economic deprivation, and social coercion, and these were all combined to deprive some groups of rights, dignity, and the ability to fully participate in the life of society. Destroying the myth of purity of birth and revealing the historical policy of creating a hierarchy of caste, Dr. Ambedkar reshaped the concept of untouchability to a flaw and said it was not a moral defect but a matter of power and institutionalised injustice.

The multi-layered eradication plan of Dr. Ambedkar was significant as well. He did not just have one solution but a whole scheme, which involved economic restructuring, political organisation, education, application of law, constitutional guarantees and, where necessary, an essential ethical break with religious traditions that justified injustice. Even though he frequently stressed that law guarantees could not work without organised political agency or social vigilance, law and constitutional rights played a pivotal role in his dream. He was also an advocate of Buddhism, which also illustrated his belief that social emancipation required moral and cultural change, rather than institutional reform.

The fact that caste-bias continues successfully in contemporary India, often in new forms though no less oppressive, proves the importance of the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar. The persistence of the systems that he proposed through caste-based violence, spatial marginalisation, and informal exclusion remains a crucial tool to address these problems to date.

Finally, the approach of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has broader implications on the contemporary discourse on democracy, social justice, and human rights. His writing can act as a reminder that human rights should be premised on material conditions and communal empowerment, and that political democracy cannot prevail without social equality. By so doing, the ideas of Dr Ambedkar are not limited to their historical context, but they remain an important point that can be used to oppose. Dr Ambedkar's thought goes beyond its historical background and remains a powerful instrument that allows seeing a more just and egalitarian social order.

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