
CONCEPT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF B.R. AMBEDKAR

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical study of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice, emphasizing his transformative vision of a society free from discrimination and inequality. Dr. Ambedkar's concept of social justice is deeply rooted in his fight against caste-based oppression, his advocacy for the annihilation of caste, and his unwavering commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity as fundamental values. The study examines his critique of the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate injustice and marginalization, particularly against Dalits and other oppressed communities. It explores Ambedkar's strategies for achieving social justice, including constitutional safeguards, educational reforms, and the promotion of democratic principles. Furthermore, the paper evaluates the enduring relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in contemporary society and their potential to address global issues of inequality and exclusion.

KEYWORDS: Social justice, caste system, equality, liberty, fraternity, social transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social justice, as a concept, seeks to create a society where equality, fairness, and dignity are ensured for all individuals, irrespective of their social, economic, or cultural backgrounds. In India, the notion of social justice holds particular significance due to the entrenched inequalities perpetuated by the caste system, economic disparities, and historical exclusion of marginalized communities. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a towering figure in Indian history, dedicated his life to addressing these systemic injustices and championing the cause of social justice. Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice is rooted in his vision of an egalitarian society,

guided by the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Through his critique of caste-based oppression, his advocacy for constitutional safeguards, and his promotion of education and socio-political reforms, Ambedkar sought to dismantle structures of discrimination and empower the oppressed. His contributions to drafting the Indian Constitution, particularly provisions aimed at protecting the rights of marginalized groups, reflect his commitment to creating an inclusive social order.

This study critically examines Ambedkar's conceptualization of social justice, exploring its foundations, evolution, and practical application. It delves into his critique of the caste system, his emphasis on democratic values, and his strategies for fostering an equitable society. The paper also evaluates the relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in addressing contemporary issues of inequality, exclusion, and injustice, both in India and globally. By understanding Ambedkar's philosophy, we gain valuable insights into the transformative potential of social justice in creating a more inclusive and harmonious world.

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF CASTE

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of social justice is inextricably linked to his critique of the caste system in India. According to Ambedkar, caste is not merely a social hierarchy but a deeply entrenched system of discrimination that perpetuates inequality, oppression, and exploitation. In his view, caste-based discrimination denied marginalized communities, particularly the Dalits, their basic human dignity, rights, and opportunities, making it the primary barrier to achieving social justice.

Caste as a Barrier to Justice: Ambedkar argued that caste prevented the realization of equality by confining individuals to ascribed roles and limiting their access to education, resources, and social mobility. Dalits, being relegated to caste-bound occupations and treated as "untouchables," faced systemic exclusion from society's economic, political, and cultural life. This institutionalized discrimination perpetuated cycles of poverty and denied them the chance to participate as equals in society.

Annihilation of Caste: For Ambedkar, the annihilation of caste was a prerequisite for establishing social justice. In his seminal work *Annihilation of Caste*, he delivered a scathing critique of Hindu orthodoxy and religious practices that upheld caste hierarchies. He advocated for the complete abolition of the caste system, arguing that true social justice could only be achieved in an egalitarian society where individuals were valued based on merit, not birth.

Ambedkar's call for the annihilation of caste was not just a social reform; it was a revolutionary vision for a just and inclusive society. His philosophy continues to inspire movements against caste-based discrimination, highlighting the enduring relevance of his ideas in contemporary struggles for equality and human rights.

3. LEGAL AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's role in shaping India's legal and political justice was pivotal in creating a democratic and egalitarian society. He understood that true social justice could only be achieved when marginalized communities were granted legal rights and political representation, which is why he worked to embed these principles into the Indian Constitution.

I. Affirmative Action: Ambedkar was a strong advocate for affirmative action to uplift Dalits and other oppressed groups, addressing centuries of social and economic exclusion.

Reservations in Education, Employment, and Legislature: He promoted quotas in education, government jobs, and the legislature to ensure these communities had equal opportunities for advancement.

Compensating for Historical Injustice: Ambedkar viewed affirmative action as a compensatory mechanism to help marginalized groups overcome historical discrimination and achieve social mobility.

II. Political Representation: Ambedkar also emphasized the need for political representation for marginalized groups. He ensured that Dalits and backward classes had reserved seats in local, state, and national legislatures, giving them a voice in decision-making processes.

III. Ambedkar's Legacy: Ambedkar's legacy continues to shape India's legal and political landscape, ensuring that marginalized communities are protected by law and have access to opportunities for social, educational, and economic advancement. His contributions remain foundational in the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality in India.

4. ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF DALITS

Ambedkar placed significant emphasis on the economic empowerment of Dalits and other marginalized communities. Recognizing the systemic barriers that kept Dalits in perpetual poverty, he advocated for:

Land Reforms: Redistribution of land to provide economic security and independence for marginalized communities, breaking the historical link between caste and economic exploitation.

Access to Education: Education was a cornerstone of Ambedkar's vision for empowerment. He believed that access to quality education would enable Dalits to secure better opportunities and challenge societal inequalities.

Economic Opportunities: Ambedkar pushed for the creation of avenues where Dalits could participate in mainstream economic activities, free from caste-based restrictions.

5. CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM

Ambedkar was a vocal critic of the capitalist system, which he saw as inherently exploitative, particularly of the working class and the marginalized. His concerns about capitalism included:

Exploitation of Labor: He argued that unregulated capitalism concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, perpetuating the exploitation of the laboring classes.

Marginalization of the Poor: Ambedkar highlighted how capitalist structures reinforced existing social hierarchies, deepening economic inequalities and marginalizing Dalits and other oppressed groups.

Reform-Oriented Approach: He proposed economic reforms aimed at reducing class divisions, advocating for state intervention and policies to ensure equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

6. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice was deeply intertwined with his views on religion, as he recognized its profound influence on the social structures and hierarchies in India. He believed that religion, while having the potential to guide moral and ethical behavior, had been misused to perpetuate inequality, especially through the caste system.

Critique of Hinduism and the Caste System: Ambedkar was a vocal critic of Hinduism, primarily because of its close association with the caste system, which institutionalized discrimination and dehumanized Dalits. He argued that Hindu religious practices and texts, such as the Manusmriti, legitimized social inequality and perpetuated oppression. For Ambedkar, any attempt to achieve social justice would remain incomplete without addressing the religious roots of caste-based discrimination.

Conversion to Buddhism: One of the most significant steps in Ambedkar's fight for social justice was his conversion to Buddhism on October 14, 1956. Along with nearly 500,000 of his followers, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism, rejecting Hinduism and its caste hierarchy. He chose Buddhism because it embodied values of equality, non-violence, and social justice. For

Ambedkar, Buddhism offered a spiritual framework that aligned with his ideals of human dignity and liberation, free from caste-based oppression.

Religion as a Tool for Liberation: Ambedkar saw religion as a powerful tool for social transformation. He believed that for true social justice to be achieved, people must adopt a religion that promotes equality, fraternity, and social harmony. His conversion to Buddhism was not just a personal spiritual decision but a strategic move aimed at providing Dalits with a sense of identity, dignity, and empowerment. It symbolized a break from the oppressive structures of Hinduism and a step toward a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Legacy of Ambedkar's Religious Philosophy: Ambedkar's advocacy for religious transformation had far-reaching implications. His conversion to Buddhism initiated a socio-political movement, inspiring millions of Dalits to seek liberation from caste oppression through the adoption of a religion rooted in equality. It highlighted the role of ethical and moral frameworks in challenging entrenched hierarchies and creating a just society.

7. AMBEDKAR'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND FRATERNITY

Ambedkar was deeply influenced by the French Revolution's ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which he adapted to the Indian context. For Ambedkar, these principles were foundational to his vision of social justice:

Liberty: Ambedkar emphasized the importance of personal freedom and autonomy. He argued that liberty meant the freedom to think, speak, and live without the constraints imposed by the caste system or social hierarchies. He believed that liberty was essential for individuals to pursue their own happiness and contribute to society.

Equality: Ambedkar's commitment to equality was reflected in his lifelong struggle for the rights of Dalits, women, and other marginalized groups. He argued that without equality, justice was impossible. His fight for equality extended beyond legal equality to social and economic equality.

Fraternity: Ambedkar believed that social justice could only be achieved in a society where individuals respected each other as equals. He envisioned a society in which people, regardless of their caste or background, could live together in harmony, bound by mutual respect and brotherhood.

8. CRITICISM AND CHALLENGES

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice has faced several criticisms, primarily concerning its focus, approach, and practical application.

Emphasis on Individual Rights: While Ambedkar's focus on individual rights was crucial for empowering marginalized communities, critics argue that it downplayed the importance of communal solidarity and collective action, essential for large-scale social transformation. Moreover, his reliance on state intervention created a framework where marginalized groups depended on government policies, such as reservations, rather than fostering self-sustaining movements. Constitutional reforms, though significant, are seen as having limited impact on deeply entrenched socio-cultural practices, such as caste discrimination, especially in rural areas.

Religious Conversion: Ambedkar's call for religious conversion, particularly to Buddhism, was seen as a symbolic rejection of caste oppression, but its impact was limited in addressing socio-economic inequalities. Critics viewed his decision to abandon Hinduism rather than reform it from within as avoiding systemic reform that could have potentially transformed society at a larger scale. Furthermore, conversion to Buddhism, while providing spiritual liberation, did not automatically eliminate caste-based prejudices, which often persisted within the new religious framework.

Relationship with Marxism: Ambedkar critiqued Marxism for its failure to address caste as a distinct axis of oppression in India. While his emphasis on caste as primary was insightful, Marxist critics argue that he could have integrated caste and class struggles for a more comprehensive approach to inequality. His advocacy for state-driven reforms and constitutional democracy also diverged from the revolutionary class struggle envisioned by Marxism, leading to criticism that his approach was less radical in addressing economic disparities.

9. CONCLUSION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice represents a transformative vision aimed at eradicating social, economic, and political inequalities in Indian society. His ideas were rooted in a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of caste, class, and religion, which he viewed as fundamental barriers to justice and equality. Ambedkar's concept of social justice was not merely theoretical but was informed by the lived realities of the oppressed, especially the Dalits, and was grounded in actionable reforms. Ambedkar envisioned social justice as the creation of a society where every individual, regardless of caste, class, religion, or gender, could live with dignity, equality, and freedom. His efforts to challenge the oppressive structures of the caste system, promote education and economic empowerment, and ensure political representation for marginalized groups reflected a comprehensive and

practical approach to achieving justice. His critique of Hinduism and its role in perpetuating caste-based inequalities led to his historic conversion to Buddhism, a move that symbolized liberation from the oppressive structures of traditional religion. By embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar not only provided Dalits with a new spiritual identity but also laid the foundation for a socio-political movement that sought justice, equality, and fraternity.

Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice is both timeless and universal. It underscores the importance of dismantling systemic barriers, promoting human dignity, and creating inclusive institutions to ensure fairness and equity for all. His ideas continue to inspire struggles for social and economic justice, not just in India but globally, as societies grapple with issues of inequality and oppression. Ultimately, Ambedkar's work serves as a beacon of hope and a call to action for building a just and egalitarian world.

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