

# **A STUDY ON DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND RELEVANCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THOUGHTS ON SCHEDULED CASTES**

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## **Abstract**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's economic development thoughts regarding Scheduled Castes (SCs) represent a transformative framework that emphasizes social justice, political representation, and economic empowerment, rather than mere charity. His vision, rooted in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, sought to dismantle the structural, caste-based inequalities that marginalized Dalits for centuries. His philosophy and, specifically, his focus on education and state-led development, remain highly relevant for the contemporary development of Scheduled Castes in India. Ambedkar linked economic reform inseparably to social reform: without annihilating caste, economic equality would remain illusory. He critiqued approaches prioritizing only property equalization (e.g., some socialist views) without addressing caste hierarchies.

## **Introduction:**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, widely regarded as the architect of India's Constitution and a champion of the oppressed, particularly the Scheduled Castes (formerly known as "Depressed Classes" or Dalits), integrated economic thought deeply into his vision for social emancipation. He viewed caste not merely as a social or religious institution but as an economic structure that perpetuated exploitation, inequality, and underdevelopment. His ideas emphasized that true liberation for Scheduled Castes required breaking caste-based economic dependencies, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and state-led interventions to counter historical exclusion. Ambedkar identified land monopoly by upper castes as the material foundation of the caste system in rural India. Scheduled Castes, largely landless laborers, remained economically dependent on upper-caste villagers, reinforcing servitude and untouchability. He argued that this dependency blocked access to resources and perpetuated poverty.

## **Ambedkar's Development Thought for Scheduled Castes**

### **Education as Liberation:**

Ambedkar identified education as the primary tool for empowerment, enabling Dalits to break the cycle of oppression and cultivate their minds to challenge injustice. Ambedkar saw education as the milk of the lioness, empowering SCs to escape ignorance and subjugation. In his 1940 speech at the All-India Depressed Classes Conference, he urged: "Educate, Agitate, Organize." He advocated free, compulsory, and secular education, critiquing caste-biased curricula that reinforced hierarchies. Reservations in education (Article 15(4)) were his innovation to counter exclusion, yet he stressed quality over quotas, warning of educated

untouchables remaining marginalized without societal change. For SCs, education fosters financial autonomy and dignity, addressing low literacy rates (66.1% for SCs vs. 74% national average, 2011 Census). Ambedkar's establishment of People's Education Society (1945) and colleges like Siddharth College exemplified this.

### **Economic Empowerment:**

Ambedkar's economic thought critiqued capitalism's caste-mediated inequalities, advocating state socialism in *States and Minorities* (1947). He proposed nationalization of key industries, land reforms, and labor rights to ensure economic democracy. For SCs, confined to agrarian serfdom, he demanded land redistribution and access to credit, recognizing caste as an economic barrier in rural areas. In *The Problem of the Rupee*, he linked monetary policy to stability, enabling inclusive growth. Reservations in employment (Article 16(4)) and welfare schemes like MGNREGA echo his vision, aiming to break poverty cycles through skill development and entrepreneurship. He believed that political rights were meaningless without economic security. He advocated for land reforms, land redistribution, and state-led industrialization to break the feudal bondage of the rural economy.

### **Political Participation:**

Political power was Ambedkar's weapon against oppression. Founding the Scheduled Castes Federation (1942), he pushed for reserved seats and separate electorates to amplify SC voices. He argued in the Constituent Assembly that without representation, democracy becomes "a farce." His emphasis on constitutional morality guards against caste-based vote-bank politics. He championed the need for an independent political voice for the oppressed, leading to the formation of political organizations to ensure representation in decision-making.

### **Social Justice:**

Social justice, for Ambedkar, integrated all domains: abolishing untouchability (Article 17), prohibiting discrimination (Article 15), and promoting fraternity. He envisioned inter-caste marriages and temple entries as cultural disruptors, alongside legal tools like the Atrocities Act (1989). These thoughts form a cohesive framework: education builds capacity, economy provides security, politics ensures voice, and social justice cements equality. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, he embedded protections against untouchability and established affirmative action (reservations) in education and government jobs to create a level playing field.

### **Economic Reforms:**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a visionary chief and key designer of the Indian Constitution, had huge bits of knowledge into monetary changes. While he is principally known for his commitments to civil rights and elevating underestimated networks, his financial thoughts likewise merit consideration. A portion of the key financial changes upheld by Dr. Ambedkar include: he was areas of strength for a for land changes, especially to resolve issues of landlessness and the grouping of land proprietorship. He accepted that land ought to be appropriated all the more impartially, and he presented bills in the Bombay Administrative Gathering to nullify frameworks like the Khoti framework, which took advantage of occupants.

While he upheld industrialization, Dr. Ambedkar additionally had faith in the significance of state mediation to guarantee even-handed dissemination of assets and to safeguard the interests of minimized networks. He considered the job of the state to be essential in advancing social and monetary equity. Dr. Ambedkar focused on the meaning of a fair tax collection framework. He contended that tax collection ought to be moderate and planned in a manner that doesn't trouble the poor lopsidedly. He accepted that a simply charge framework would assist with financing social government assistance projects and backing monetary turn of events.

Dr. Ambedkar perceived the requirement for sufficient framework, like streets, power, and water system, to help monetary development. He underscored the significance of legitimate preparation and interest in foundation to support generally advancement. Dr. Ambedkar was worried about the monetary prohibition of underestimated networks. He had faith in giving admittance to credit and monetary administrations for the upliftment of these networks, guaranteeing their dynamic cooperation in financial exercises. Dr. Ambedkar's monetary thoughts were entwined with his obligation to civil rights, and he accepted that financial changes ought to be intended to elevate the persecuted and diminish imbalances in the public eye. His vision for monetary changes pointed toward making an all the more and comprehensive society, where potential open doors and assets were open to all, regardless of their experience.

### **Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies:**

Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the paramount importance of agriculture as the primary industry, a cornerstone of India's economy. The nation relies heavily on agricultural farming. Addressing the core issues within the agricultural economy such as optimal crop selection, balanced allocation of production factors, land holding sizes, land tenure structures, and associated matters has remained challenging over time. Despite the introduction of various reforms across different states, the agricultural sector persists in grappling with the very challenges Dr. Ambedkar identified in his article "Small holdings in India and their remedies," a century ago.

In this article written in 1918, Dr. Ambedkar confronted a problem that continues to afflict India's agrarian landscape: the prevalence of small land holdings and the resulting low land productivity. Dr. Ambedkar conducted a rigorous examination of the existing scenario and argued that there is no universally applicable "correct" size for agricultural holdings. He highlighted the complexity of factors involved in agricultural production and underscored the challenge of determining an optimal holding size.

His insights remain relevant as they reflect on the enduring difficulties surrounding land distribution and productivity. Despite the passage of time and the implementation of varying degrees of reforms, the issues he discussed in his article continue to cast a shadow over India's agricultural system.<sup>1</sup>

### **Economics of Caste System and Untouchability:**

Ambedkar, a professional economist, stands out as one of the earliest thinkers to dissect the economic aspects of social issues in India, including the caste system and untouchability.

His original analyses of these topics are presented in two notable works: “Annihilation of Castes,” first published in 1936, and “What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables,” published in 1944.

Annihilation of Castes initially took the form of a speech for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal in Lahore. Ambedkar’s forceful critique of the caste system and Chaturvarna was so daring that the conference was cancelled due to concerns that the speech’s views would be too controversial. This speech, later published as a book, also sparked a series of critical articles from Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan (July 11, 18, August 15, 1936). Ambedkar responded to Gandhi’s objections with well-considered rebuttals.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Economics of the Caste System:**

Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that this division was not based on aptitude or individual choice but stemmed from predestination. The caste system limited social mobility and economic growth by confining individuals to predetermined roles and inhibiting the adoption of new occupations. Ambedkar critiqued the caste-based stratification of occupations and its negative impact on efficiency and economic development. He highlighted that economic progress requires the freedom to choose and adapt to changing occupations, a principle hindered by the caste system.

Ambedkar argued that the perpetuation of caste-based socio-economic patterns hindered economic development. He believed that the caste system’s stigma and restrictions on occupations undermined work efficiency and mental engagement. He called for the “annihilation of castes” to enable rapid economic growth and development by breaking free from the constraints of the caste system. He argued that the annihilation of caste was necessary, as the caste system acted as a division of labourers that restricted mobility, skills, and market access.

### **Protection of Weaker Sections of the Society:**

As an economist, Dr. Ambedkar always remained preoccupied with wellbeing of the common man. According to him, economic development of a country depends upon the growth of its three major sectors such as agriculture, industry and tertiary sector including banking and public finance. It may also be noted that economic growth with distributive equity and social justice will not be achieved without the economic and political policies of enlistment of the less privileged sections of the community. Dr. Ambedkar’s remarkable contribution to economics, therefore, lies in his views on the need to protect and safeguard the interests of the weaker sections of the society. On behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation Dr. Ambedkar submitted a memorandum to the constituent Assembly, which is known as the “State and Minorities”. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the “State and Minorities” reveals Dr. Ambedkar model of economic development for independent India. Throughout his life, Dr. Ambedkar held that in the absence of social and economic democracy, political democracy is meaningless. He argued that for ensuring economic democracy the state intervention in the economic affairs of the country was unavoidable.

The essential feature of Dr. Ambedkar’s approach to economic problem was his condemnation of extreme views like laissez faire and scientific socialism. Therefore, mixed

economy was the cornerstone of his philosophy. He stood for the progressive transformation of society, removing glaring social and economic inequalities that were due to the capitalist system. His idea of economic relationship was rational in so far as it insisted on the economic welfare of the poorer sections of the society and regarded economic values as a means and not as an end in themselves. Therefore, his concept of society and socialism aimed for the welfare of the poor classes, ending inequality based on birth, eliminating discriminatory practices in social behaviour patterns reorganizing the political economy. For the benefit of all, maintaining full employment and education, providing social security for the weak and the sick, and finally rebuilding Indian society on the foundation of co-operation, love and friendship rather than the division of men into rigid social barriers. The trend towards this aim in Indian society could be accelerated by conscious democratic effort.

The struggle for the emancipation revolution. Partial change is impossible. We do not want it either. We want a complete and total revolutionary change. Even if we want to move out of the present state of social degradation alone, we will have to exercise our power in economic, political and cultural fields as well. Change of heart, liberal education etc. will not end other states of exploration. Our ideas of social revolution and rebellion will not be borne by such paper-made vehicles. They will sprout in the soil, flower in the mind and they will come into full being with the help of a steel-strong vehicle.

Truly speaking the problem of Dalits or scheduled castes and tribes have become a broad problem, a Dalit is not merely an untouchable outside the village walls and the scriptures. He is an untouchable and he is a Dalit, but he is also worker, a landless labourer, a proletarian. And unless we strengthen the growing revolutionary unity of the many, with all our efforts, our existence has no future. The Dalits must accordingly accept the section of masses, the other revolutionary forms a part of his own movement. Only then he would be able to fight his enemies effectively. If this does not take place, we will be condensed to a position worse than slavery. We must develop and help this consciousness to ripen every year, every month, every day, every moment. Then alone shall we be called human beings at all. It is for this that Dr. Ambedkar made us realise our humanity even in our state of beast-like exploitation. We should not fall prey to slogans and outbursts. We must uproot the caste system, the caste system, that enslaves us in its shares. The soil in which they survive and grow must be made infertile. We must understand that the caste nature of the term Dalit is breaking down. Ambedkar struggled against the inhuman practices and succeeded in putting a good part of mighty Manu upside down.

We must make all efforts to change the existing conditions of the Dalits as the Dalits, the workers, the landless and poor peasants did not become free, the mud at the bottom of the pond remained where it was. The roots of democracy are to be found in social relationships in terms of associated life between the people who form the society. Ambedkar's chief concern was to meet the challenges of wrongly idealized social relations which threatened the whole of human existence and shook the foundation of moral and just social order.

### **Relevance of Ambedkar's Thoughts Today**

In contemporary India, Ambedkar's ideas remain highly pertinent amidst persistent socio-economic disparities for Scheduled Castes:



- **Ongoing inequalities:** Despite progress through reservations and affirmative action, gaps persist in land ownership, private sector employment, higher education, assets, and entrepreneurship. Caste discrimination continues in labor markets, housing, and institutions, limiting access to opportunities.
- **Land and agrarian issues:** Landlessness among Dalits remains a challenge, with economic dependence in rural areas echoing historical patterns. Ambedkar's call for redistribution and breaking village monopolies aligns with demands for effective land reforms and inclusive agricultural policies.
- **Economic empowerment strategies:** His emphasis on state-led development, financial inclusion, skill development, credit access, and entrepreneurship resonates with modern policies like welfare schemes, skill missions, and financial inclusion drives. However, critics note that neoliberal shifts since the 1990s have sometimes marginalized public sector roles and social spending, potentially excluding vulnerable groups.
- **Missing entitlements:** Discussions highlight "missing entitlements" in land, labor, and education due to caste consciousness. Ambedkar's framework helps explain why growth benefits are unevenly distributed, with Scheduled Castes often lagging in human development indicators.
- **Social justice and inclusive growth:** In an era of rising inequality, his vision of balancing economic growth with social democracy through structural equalization, anti-discrimination laws, and state welfare offers a blueprint for addressing graded inequality and ensuring no group is left behind.

### Critical Challenges and Limitations

- **Implementation Gaps:** While constitutional provisions are robust, weak implementation, bureaucratic hurdles, and caste-based resistance in rural areas often hinder the full impact of these policies.
- **Privatization Impact:** The rapid privatization of public sector undertakings has reduced the scope of reservations, creating a challenge that requires new strategies for securing employment.
- **Persistence of Casteism:** Despite legal reforms, caste-based discrimination and violence persist, requiring a shift in societal mindset alongside legal and economic interventions.

### Conclusion

Dr. Ambedkar's vision remains a cornerstone for inclusive development in India, emphasizing that true national progress is impossible without the complete liberation and advancement of the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar's economic philosophy was pragmatic and inclusive, rejecting rigid ideologies in favor of measures uplifting the downtrodden. His insistence on annihilating caste as a prerequisite for genuine development underscores that economic progress without social justice remains incomplete. In today's India, revisiting these thoughts can guide policies toward more equitable and sustainable development for Scheduled Castes and marginalized communities.

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