



Dr. Ambedkar's Vision and the Making of an Inclusive India: Foundations and Contemporary Challenges in Social Justice and Equity

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ABSTRACT

The study centres around Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his conceptual framework for the inclusive Indian nation, which he saw as based on social justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity. Ambedkar's nationhood differs from traditional conceptions- a religious one based on nations or some cultural or linguistic commonality- in that he bases his construct on democratic ethics and dismantling the caste/class system. He advocated constitutional reforms, socio-economic equality, education for marginalized sections, and the active involvement of various oppressed communities in the struggle for making a just, egalitarian society. Analysed Ambedkar's critiques of Brahmanical nationalism and rejected the symbolic unity of the people in favor of advocating for structural transformation of society, arguing that the true strength of a nation, its absolute security, lies in ensuring justice and equal opportunity to all its citizens. From this perspective, Ambedkar's notion of India emerges as a moral and constitutional project for integrating a socially fractured society into one cohesive, democratic, and inclusive state.

Keywords

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Inclusive Nation, Social Justice, Equality, Liberty, Fraternity, Caste System, Constitutional Democracy, Nation-Building, Economic Justice, Education, Dalit Empowerment, Secularism.

The Basic Concept of a Nation

Historically, culturally, and politically, the nation offers numerous possibilities. Broadly defined, a nation is typically considered a large group of people sharing a common identity, culture, history, language, and political ideology. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, nation derives from the Latin word nation-to bring forth, to be born, or a people. Therefore, a nation goes beyond a geographical territory; it stands for people united by values or characteristics that form a collective identity that cuts across individual or regional differences.

In its simplest form, a nation is a social construct that brings individuals together for a political community. A nation generally has a shared sense of history, culture, and aspirations. Nationalism, as a political ideology, usually asserts the sovereignty of a nation-state and mainly emphasizes unity, self-determination of the people, and protection of national interests.

Although the broad concept of a country can include those shared attributes, the definition and characteristics of a nation can differ on occasion. Ambedkar came to view a nation as grounded on his understanding of social justice, equality, and a shared society in which people live with dignity and respect regardless of caste, religion, or ethnicity.

Ambedkar's Idea of a Nation

"I am of the opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? In India, there are castes. The castes are anti-national. In the first place because, they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste. But we must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint." Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of the nation was based squarely on social justice and an inclusive society. While many contemporaries celebrated a nation based on ethnicity, religion, or a shared historical narrative, Ambedkar completely rejected such notions. The very basis of the concept of the Indian nation for Ambedkar was not any idea of cultural or ethnic homogeneity but the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, as espoused in the French Revolution and further accepted in the Constitution of India. He contended that a nation must stand for all values that ensure justice to all its members, especially to the downtrodden and marginal communities, such as the Dalits and women.

Thus, for him, an elite group might preach equality, justice, and democracy; a real democracy, an Ambedkarite democracy, comprises these values and aims in its deepest crevices. Thus, for Ambedkar, actualizing human rights and social equality is a secular and democratic value. According to Ambedkar, 'A nation is strong not when its people are uniform but when they can live together in a society that guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all its members irrespective of caste, religion or social position. His notion of the nation was intimately intertwined with his larger struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed.

Ambedkar expresses: "A nation is not made of people who are merely united by a language, a religion, or a geographical area; it is made of people who are united by a sense of justice and equality." (*Ambedkar, 1979 p. 157*).

Ambedkar's Vision for Nation-Building.

Ideas of nation-building from within the folds of Dr Ambedkar's paper are so revolutionary. According to him, a nation could not come into being by political independence from colonial shackles. A profound structural transformation was needed in the conditions dealing with social, economic, and political perspectives to ensure equal opportunities for the all citizens. The idea of Ambedkar with regards to nation building can be summarised under the following heads:

1: Social Justice as the Cornerstone of Nation-Building.

For Ambedkar, social justice formed the basis of nation-building. It effectively meant that no nation could thrive unless it provided even-handed justice to all its citizens, especially the underprivileged sections. He argues this in *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (*Ambedkar, 1991*) when he observes that caste discrimination has always been a part of India's very social fabric, giving rise to systemic inequality. His nation-building program included dissolving the caste system, legally defending marginalized communities, and equalizing opportunities in education, employment, and social participation. Ambedkar envisioned India as one where social justice would not be an ideal merely pursued in theory but would be realizable through laws, social reforms, and policies. His fight, therefore, for affirmative action for Dalits and other marginalized persons was part and parcel of his larger design to drive all citizens into the nexus of nation-building.

2: Constitutional Reforms and the Framework of Justice

Surely, Ambedkar's constitution-making job was the most important contribution to nation-building. As the head of the committee constituted to draft the Constitution, Ambedkar introduced the Constitution to include the very principles of social justice, human rights, and equality. He perceived the eradication of untouchability, freedom of rights, and terrorist reservation categories for Dalits as part of developing this inclusive nation.

He believed that political independence will not bring about the emergence of a just nation unaided. In his evidence before the Southborough Committee (*Ambedkar, 1979, p. 112*), he argued that India needed a legal framework to protect its marginalized citizens. His work in drafting the Indian Constitution laid the base for a nation where everyone, irrespective of caste or religion, would have legal entitlement to freedom, equality, and justice.

3: Economic Reforms for Inclusive Growth

Ambedkar made economic reforms as one of the components of nation-building schemes, which he conceived to reduce inequalities with inclusive growth. Land reforms were to empower agricultural labourers, especially Dalits, while his economic policies aimed to reduce wealth concentration and promote the economic empowerment of marginalized communities. The Indian Ghetto: The Centre of Untouchability (*Ambedkar, 1989, p. 243*) leaves no doubt that economic justice was fundamental in creating a nation that became then really inclusive and just. His economic ideas concerned poverty alleviation and creating a monetary system where every citizen had equal opportunities. These two factors formed the main body of his contribution to policy formulation for independent India, such as initiating land reforms and developing social welfare schemes for the poorer section.

4: Education as the Key to Nation-Building

Ambedkar viewed education as a key component in nation-building. He stressed that, for him and others, the most critical aspect of education was the empowerment of the underprivileged, especially Dalits. His struggle to gain an education and his advocacy for establishing institutions for Dalit students thereby integrated into his much larger vision for building a nation that would give opportunities for the development of all its citizens, socially, politically, and economically. During his address to the Round Table Conference in 1932, he mentioned that education for the depressed classes would determine India's future.

Although Ambedkar's focus on Dalit education also included constructing schools and colleges, he was primarily concerned with reforming an unjust and oppressive education system. Through his lenses, education could break the chains of caste discrimination and empower individuals to participate fully in political and economic life.

Features of the Indian Nation from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Perspective

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's understanding of the Indian nation varied considerably from the earlier romantic and spiritual conceptions widely popular during the freedom struggle. His view was based on a realist perspective, with social justice and structural transformation at its core. Unlike many of his contemporary thinkers, Ambedkar did not view India as primarily an ancient civilization with an ever-present identity; instead, he saw it as a deeply stratified society in immediate need of democratization and moral reconstruction. His perspective on the idea of the Indian nation was characterized by an analytical tone, with a procedure born out of the pragmatic experience while being heavily influenced by his personal experiences as a member of the oppressed Dalit community.

1. Nationhood Rooted in Social Equality

In Ambedkar's view, the foundation of any true nationhood had to rest on social equality. For him, geographical unity or recollection of a common cultural past could never suffice to define a nation. Ambedkar's position was that under the British, India could not be called a nation in the true sense as long as the people were not united in fraternity. As quoted above, he said: "I am of opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation?" (*Annihilation of Caste, 1936*) His critique implied that caste is more than a social division; it seriously hinders fulfilling nationhood. In

Ambedkar's view, the dismantling of the caste hierarchy in the most prolonged way and installing social justice would be the only way to attain the elementary unity of the nation.

2. Ethical Foundations of National Identity

Ambedkar opined that the nation should be bound not by sentiment and tradition but by moral values like justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These values, enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution drafted by Ambedkar, were meant to be actionable principles of nation-building rather than abstract ideas. Ambedkar regarded fraternity as the most important since liberty and equality would perish in its absence. He held that the bonds of fraternity must connect all citizens across caste and religious lines so that society does not disintegrate. He expressed this thought in his address to the Constituent Assembly (1949), cautioning, "We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy."

3. Rejection of Brahmanical Nationalism

Ambedkar was very critical of so-called "Brahmanical nationalism," an idea of Indian identity that was casteist and excluded the voices and rights of the lower castes and religious minorities. He saw this type of nationalism as a continuation of oppression that has been exercising its will upon the majority of Indians for centuries. Ambedkar saw the upper-caste intellectuals and reformers employing nationalism for their social interests, often glossing over the realities of caste discrimination and social exclusion. The resolution put Ambedkar in a position of opposing radical democratic nationalism that sought to redefine the nation based on inclusion and egalitarian principles

4. The Constitutional Nation

He envisioned India as a constitutional nation governed by the rule of law, with individual rights explicitly enshrined and protected—perhaps one of Dr. Ambedkar's most living legacies. He never considered the Constitution a mere legal document; it was a potent weapon for fighting the battle for social transformation toward a just and equitable society.

To him, the Constitution was a new social contract that envisioned a rupture with the legacies of feudalism and hierarchy. He believed that it would enable what he termed the "graded revolution," an idea that India turned towards a merit-oriented society from a caste-oriented one, which would also fulfil the aspirations of rights and duties. He fulfilled an inclusive, secular, and democratic vision of nationhood via constitutional provisions such as affirmative action (reservations), protection of minorities, and the abolition of untouchability (Article 17).

5. Secularism and Cultural Pluralism

Ambedkar's idea of nationalism came across as extremely secular and pluralistic. It did not conform to the idea of India being a Hindu nation (as propounded by Hindu nationalists like Savarkar), nor did he ever believe in any religious supremacy. He argued that religion was a privileged matter and should not be interfered with by the state's policies.

In Thoughts on Pakistan (1941), he further expounded upon his idea that India should be a secular democracy where the state and religion were separate. He envisioned a culture of pluralism to ensure the peaceful coexistence of linguistic, religious, and ethnic minorities in a larger national framework.

6. Economic Justice as a Pillar of National Integration

Nations that suffer economic inequality, by Ambedkar's calculation, find their unity threatened. His concern for the economic order of society is apparent in every one of his pronouncements and philosophies and, to a great extent, is said to be rooted in Marxian and Fabian socialist thought that would prefer the redistribution of resource endowments, land reforms, and workers' rights. So, he said that an economically marginalized section of a population cannot constitute a nation that draws its strength from its unity. In his address to the Constituent Assembly, he said that liberty stood meaningless without economic equality: "Politically, we will have equality,

and in our social and economic life, we will have inequality... How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions?" In Ambedkar's words, economic democracy seems to have extended the idea of nationhood to cover the physical realm—an absolute economic justice precondition for India's unity.

7. The Role of the Marginalized in Nation-Building

Ambedkar grounded his conception of the nation in the participation of Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups in its formation. He believed that the nation could be formed only with the consent and participation of the oppressed; the dominant castes could not construct it on their own. It led to Ambedkar setting up platforms such as the Scheduled Castes Federation (1942) and later the Republican Party of India (1956), aimed at giving a political voice to the oppressed classes. Representation for these communities was an essential prerequisite in the nation-building process. In the early 1930s, Ambedkar campaigned for separate electorates for Dalits (which were altered into reserved seats following the Poona Pact) out of conviction that the oppressed should have their agency and could not rely on goodwill from the dominant classes.

Upholding the Mirror of Ambedkar's Visionary Ideas to the Problems of Today

The cream of Ambedkar's relevance speaks to modern issues of social justice and equality at their highest.

1. Education Initiatives

His arguments for education can, therefore, inspire present policies intended to broaden marginalized communities' access to quality education so that they can empower themselves to confront social injustices.

2. Reforming Policy

He directs his emphasis on legalistic forms to develop modern movements that tend toward the establishment and enforcement of laws that make it illegal to discriminate against marginalized peoples and that provide them with equality in many realms.

3. Creating Inclusive Practices

That would wipe out caste barriers and foster harmony in society; social reform must work towards instituting inclusive practices in workplaces, communities, and educational institutions.

4. Dialogue and Understanding

In the current context, it is possible to find some means of bridging such divides by encouraging the inter-community dialogue and understanding that forms the basis of Ambedkar's conception of oneness by respect and dignity.

Ambedkar's Vision and Today's Social Justice Challenges:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision for an inclusive India remains profoundly relevant in the face of contemporary challenges to social justice and equity. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a lifelong champion of the oppressed, Ambedkar envisioned a society grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity. Yet, despite constitutional guarantees and democratic progress, India continues to grapple with deeply embedded structural inequalities. Economic disparity remains a persistent barrier, with vast sections of society—particularly Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized communities—continuing to face systemic exclusion from wealth, property ownership, and financial independence. This reality starkly contrasts with Ambedkar's advocacy for state intervention, redistribution of resources, and affirmative action to ensure equitable access to opportunities.

Ambedkar was acutely aware of the dangers of caste-based discrimination, which he termed a "gradual degeneration" of Indian society. Today, caste continues to dictate social outcomes, particularly in education, employment, and access to justice. While legal safeguards exist, social hierarchies still perpetuate discrimination and violence against Dalits and lower castes. Racial, ethnic, and religious minorities too face exclusion and hate-driven rhetoric, echoing Ambedkar's warnings about the dangers of majoritarianism. His belief in constitutional morality and legal safeguards was intended to protect precisely these vulnerable groups from such oppression.

Gender equality was also integral to Ambedkar's vision. As a social reformer, he championed women's rights, advocating for laws that would grant them equality in marriage, property, and education. However, contemporary

Indian society continues to struggle with gender-based violence, wage inequality, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. These persistent inequities undermine the constitutional promise of equality and highlight the need to reaffirm Ambedkar's commitment to the dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender or caste.

Education, for Ambedkar, was the ultimate tool of empowerment. He believed that social transformation could only be achieved by ensuring universal and quality education. Yet, disparities in educational access and quality remain stark, especially in rural and marginalized areas. The digital divide has further intensified these inequalities, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, denying millions of students the right to learn. Curricula also often overlook the contributions and experiences of marginalized groups, contrary to Ambedkar's inclusive vision of education that affirms dignity and self-respect for all.

Healthcare and access to basic services continue to reflect deep social divides. Marginalized communities often suffer the worst health outcomes due to poor infrastructure, social stigma, and economic barriers. People with disabilities and mental health conditions are often neglected in public policy, echoing the systemic apathy Ambedkar sought to combat. He firmly believed that social justice must extend to the economic and physical well-being of the most vulnerable.

Dr. Ambedkar's environmental foresight is increasingly relevant in the context of climate justice. Though not widely recognized as an environmental thinker, his insistence on planned development, social ownership of resources, and protection of the poor from exploitation speaks directly to current concerns about environmental degradation and displacement of the underprivileged. Likewise, in today's digital age, Ambedkar's emphasis on equal access to knowledge and information urges us to address algorithmic bias, data privacy, and technological exclusion, which disproportionately affect the socially and economically backward classes.

In essence, the challenges facing social justice and equity in India today underscore the enduring relevance of Dr. Ambedkar's vision. His dream of an inclusive India—where caste, class, gender, and religion do not determine one's destiny—remains unfulfilled. Realizing that dream demands a renewed commitment to constitutional values, social reform, and inclusive governance. As India advances toward the goal of becoming a just and equitable society, it must draw strength from Ambedkar's life, legacy, and unflinching pursuit of justice for all.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar defined an Indian nation as being apart from those based on religion or some common culture or history. For him, a real nation would stand on justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity values that he also made fundamental to the Indian Constitution. He espoused what may be termed "ethical nationalism," where unity derives from justice and respect. He saw it as an evil system and an impediment to the idea of an integrated nation. Hence, he worked extensively for social reforms in terms of laws for the oppressed, education, and economic opportunities. Vision and ideas are tools for Ambedkar in the construction of a new and just society based on the ideals Ambedkar stood for during his life.

Conclusively quoting Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his own words at the Round Table Conference in London(1930), while he was fighting a dual battle in colonial India against the twin horrors of British imperialism and the social discrimination of the caste system, that: "**First and foremost, I am an Indian.**"

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