

Caste Discrimination and The Necessity of Reservation in Ambedkars Thought

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Uday Bhartiya

Research Scholar

Law

P.K. University

Shivpuri M.P., India

Abstract

The intellectual and political interventions of B. R. Ambedkar brought to the fore the issue of caste as a deeply rooted system of inequality in Indian society that served not only as a system of social stratification, but also as a system of graded hierarchy and exclusion. Ambedkar did not believe that caste discrimination was a social issue that arose out of contingent and unanticipated circumstances but that it was an embedded system of discrimination that denied Scheduled Castes dignity, equality, and freedom. Without breaking the strict caste system, constitutional democracy could not be full-fledged and an illusion. Within this context, reservation took a prominent place as a calendar of social justice that was not conceived as charity or as loose change but as a right of constitutional intent within the notion of equality and representation.

Ambedkar regarded reservation as remedial system that undoes historical injustice so that it gives even opportunities and the integration of the marginalized groups into the mainstream of political, economic, and educational living. His activism was therefore based upon the ethical reasoning as well as practical politics: ethical, by affirming the right to dignity and equality of the oppressed; practical, by their ensuring effective participation in government and in institutions of the society. As discussed in this paper, using Ambedkar thought helps in contextualizing reservation as part and parcel of the milieu of a greater social transformation wherein justice and fraternity cannot prosper without institutional mechanisms to prevent caste-based discrimination. The logic presented by Ambedkar can be useful in the modern discussions as it is pertinent to keep in mind that reservation is needed to provide substantial equality, but not formal equality.

Keywords

Caste Discrimination, Reservation, Social Justice, Equality, Constitutional Safeguards, Marginalization.

Introduction

The discussion of caste in India cannot be complete without reference to the writing history of B.R. Ambedkar who is one of the greatest social thinkers and architects of contemporary India. His observations regarding caste discrimination and the need of structural solutions to the problems like caste-based reservation has remained an influential aspect of constitutional practice and politics till today as well. Ambedkar saw caste as more than a social scheme of classification; he identified caste as an oppressive order that could control inequality and exclusion[1]. He was one of the earliest to break caste down in its scientific, political, and ethical contexts as a barrier to democracy, fraternity, and social justice. The caste system was rigidly engrained in the religious, cultural, and economic aspects of Indian society therefore rendering no room in natural progress to the Indian society. In his eyes, a system that gave prestige, power, and prospects based on the caste could never allow democratic life. His thinking therefore revolved around two reformist agendas: emancipation of the caste order and the establishment of vehicles of uplift of historically disadvantaged groups.

Ambedkar believed that the essence of the Hindu social order consisted in graded inequality, and that was what caste system privileged. Compared to other types of stratification, caste was special in adjusting several strata among which no one group could even stand at level ground, thus it was almost impossible to have a uniting force among the ranks of the suppressed. Internalization of this respectful ranking was the surety that caste would last through centuries. To the supposedly untouchable later entrenched legally as the Scheduled Castes, the system spelt absolute social, political, and economic marginalisation. Ambedkar argued that these communities were stripped not only of material wealth but it had also left them devoid of self-respect and power over their destiny[2]. In this kind of environment, statements about equality or the moral persuasion would not be enough. Instead of that what was needed were the institutional security supported

by the coercive power of law ones that could guarantee the representation, the self-worth, and access. It was in this context that Ambedkar promoted the need of reservation. To him, reservation was not an act of charity or something that was given to the marginalised as a good act of fellow Indians but was a just claim of the marginalized to have access to equal opportunities at governance, education, and employment. The policy was drafted like a remedial means, according to which the shallowness of previous wrongs was to be recompensed and the social and economic chasm between brutalities and vulnerable communities was to be smoothed out. Ambedkar was very emphatic on the principle of representation and democracy could not happen without letting the excluded people have sufficient space in legislative assembly, administration and higher education[3]. In his vision reservation was a tool to make sure that Scheduled Castes along with other marginalized communities can exercise their constitutional liberties on the basis of equality with others.

Reservation as advocated strongly by Ambedkar was not only his way of achieving material wellbeing, but also a part of his grand plan of dignifying and instilling self-pride on the down trodden. He always stated that caste-based exclusion was not only in the economic but also cultural and psychological terms. It refused to acknowledge the humanity of the "untouchables," for putting them in the position of permanent inferiority. Social justice measures therefore needed to be revolutionary with the aspiration of reshaping the fundamentals of Indian society. The triumph of democracy, in the eyes of Ambedkar, was that it could end the discrimination against the castes and give actual chances to the outcasts to reach higher. Reservation thus was not a transitional measure but a constitutional way of achieving substantive equality.

During the creation of the Constitution in the Constituent Assembly Ambedkar struggled to incorporate these principles into the constitution document. He dreamt of a state where not only an ideal of equality before the law was followed but the real equality which considered existing disparities of starting points[4]. The Constitution tried to give voice to the vision by reserving legislatures, educational institutes and employment in the government. Yet, even though laws alone could not solve the problem of caste, Ambedkar was conscious of the fact that laws were absolutely necessary in this regard. He stressed on social reform and moral change and the development of fraternity among citizens. However, he stated that the marginalized groups will always be victims of inequality unless the structural barriers were broken through positive discrimination.

The need to have reservation in the thought of Ambedkar cannot thus be delinked with his larger view of caste system as a social order and his vision of creating an egalitarian society. His concepts still form a feature of the discussion on social justice in the context of contemporary India, where caste-based inequalities still prevail, which proves the topicality of the thought[5]. Critics tend to look at reservation as a way of creating dependence or reverse discrimination, though, Ambedkar had already foreseen such criticism, explaining that such measures were not meant to create lasting rifts but were only concerned with giving the historically oppressed the level playing field needed. He believes that reservations can even be reconsidered only when, and only when, genuine equality is attained. Until now they are essential to constitutionally of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

As a sum, the inclusion of reservation in the constitutional and political system of India was not an accident or an act of arbitrariness but it was a position that Ambedkar took after long years of deliberation and deep insight on the issue of caste as a systemic displacement. His reasoning highlights the fact that structural intervention is a prerequisite to unravel the capitalism social inadequacies and constitutional democracy cannot work in its true letter and spirit without it. The vision proposed by Ambedkar can therefore still be regarded as criticizing the effects of the persistence of caste discrimination as well as a guideline towards achieving social justice within India.

Objective of study

This paper discussed that the use of Ambedkar thought helps in contextualizing reservation as part and parcel of the milieu of a greater social transformation wherein justice and fraternity cannot prosper without institutional mechanisms to prevent caste-based discrimination. The logic presented by Ambedkar can be useful in the modern discussions as it is pertinent to keep in mind that reservation is needed to provide substantial equality, but not formal equality.

Review of Literature

Ambedkar's Understanding of Caste Discrimination

Ambedkar himself was the intellectual with both experienced and scholarly background involvement in caste. Being the child born to the stigmatized caste historically labelled as the untouchable, he saw through his own eyes the weaknesses and the exclusion caused by the caste systems[6]. However, unlike

most of his political predecessors who tended to rely on religious reinterpretation or a moral appeal, Ambedkar recognized caste as systemic and structural inequality that, in turn, required radical critique and institutional solutions. He found caste not only a social structure but a graded inequality ideology carefully nurtured by religious sanction, cultural activities and practices as well as social customs. To Ambedkar, caste was not incidental or transient; entrenched deep into the system was this mechanism that divided society into hierarchical compartments with each category characterised by its disparate rights, responsibilities and dignities. It was this realization that informs his continuing advocacy that there is no goodwill that can end caste discrimination and but active political action and constitutional protection. A major aspect of the analyzes of Ambedkar was his understanding of graded inequality. Contrary to slavery or racial segregation, where there is a distinct category of oppressor and another category of the oppressed, the caste system establishes an intricate hierarchy in which each caste believes it to be better off than the other but is at the same time subordinate to a higher caste[7]. This stratification structure ensures that the exploited cannot form bond of solidarity since each group is interested in preserving its relative advantage over other classes lower than it is. This is what Ambedkar termed as a very peculiar and very insidious characteristic of Indian society, of the fact that he/she who is exploited and oppressed is not only oppressed by those on the top but is also strengthened by those at other levels. Even the movements to check caste did little good under such a system since even the social identities that caste systems created were socially regulated. By pointing this out, Ambedkar emphasized how hard it would be to eliminate caste without destroying the social and cultural frameworks that promoted ghettos.

Ambedkar was also heavily critical of religious underpinnings of caste. In his classic book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) he discredited the beliefs and practices of the Hindu orthodoxy by arguing that the caste system could not be denied as part of Hindu orthodoxy. To him, untouchability and cast discrimination were given legitimacy by such books as the *Manu Smriti*, which established the caste hierarchy. This religious sanction is one thing that makes caste particularly resistant to reform according to Ambedkar since it is portrayed as something divinely ordained that is unchangeable[8]. Therefore, reformist attempts to reinterpret Hindu scriptures or draw on ideas of spiritual equality did not seem to take into account the institutionalized character of caste. Ambedkar argued that equality could not be seen as a reality without abandonment of religious approach that San classifieds caste. His subsequent conversion to Buddhism in 1956 was a political and spiritual radical act on its own, of rejection of a dominant Hindu caste-based orthodoxy and of acceptance of an alternative vision of egalitarianism.

The other important aspect of the comprehension of an Ambedkar was that he recognized caste as a social exclusion that was not restricted to ritual activities but it was present in all aspect of life. Untouchability, e.g., did not just refer to the ban in the entry of temple but in access to the water source, housing, education and jobs. Caste was the determiner of who was to own land, who should attend school, who was to sit in village councils, even who should touch food and cutlery[9]. In this respect, caste was social but economic: it imposed economic deprivation as well as cultural repugnance. The result of such exclusion over centuries, Ambedkar believed, had led to the creation of a vicious circle, whereby the deprived had no tools, confidence, or chances to change their status. This caste hostility-based structure led to the fact that marginalized groups were not able to compete with other parts on equal terms even in the formally democratic society.

Ambedkar stressed further the psychological implications of caste oppression. He pointed out to the fact that caste was not merely about externally imposed limitations but also, internally feeling inferior through understanding. Centuries of poor treatment as something less than human had resulted in a situation where people hired to clean up their mess had come to feel that they were natural in their degraded state. This, according to Ambedkar, was the process of dehumanization of the untouchables as their self-worth was destroyed through many centuries of stigma. This is a psychological dimension of caste which, in his opinion, was one of the most sinister sides of the system since it led to making the resistance harder and the reconciliation impossible except in a case of a radical reconstitution of social values. To him, the fight to end caste was an attempt to win back dignity and self-respect as much as it was a fight to acquire material rights.

There is also the political implications of caste that Ambedkar criticized. He maintained that in an Indian society stratified by caste, there is no chance of a

democracy persisting in the society since not the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity could co-exist with the hereditary hierarchy[10]. To him caste was the opposite of democracy. True democracy could not happen even had universal suffrage been granted since the illegalized would not be able to participate fully in politics. Ambedkar therefore connected removal of the caste system to the continuation of democratic rule in India by urging the necessity of the democratic system to be premised upon social equality.

Altogether, the definition of caste discrimination offered by Ambedkar was multidimensional. He conceptualized caste as a graded inequality built on the basis of religion that was perpetuated economically, reified culturally, and internalized physiologically among the victims of the caste[11]. His system was too unapologetically statistical and scientific to give much credence to superficial alterations or ethical exhortation, and at best demanded structural solutions and revolutionary change. In his analysis, he revealed that caste was not part of the past but rather a system that continues to influence all kinds of social, political, and economic practices in India. The fight against caste did not just pertain to social reform to Ambedkar, but was the precursor to achieving constitutional ideals of justice, equality, and fraternity. His most subtle interpretation further provides a vigorous point of view through which caste discrimination can be criticized both past and present.

Main Text

Caste as a System of Graded Inequality

The most original piece of this concept of graded inequality was enunciated by Ambedkar in the discourse he made on caste. Unlike the other system of oppressions which mostly Favors a breakout between the oppressor and the oppressed, caste is typified by a stratum-based hierarchy where each caste enjoys dominance over another and submits to another. It was such structure, argued Ambedkar, that rendered caste less a form of discrimination, but also a highly stable social order, in that no two social forces could come together against it. There was a conflict between castes as each caste became interested in maintaining the status quo to safeguard their relative advantages despite being subjected to subjugation by the higher castes. It is due to this aspect of graded inequality, Ambedkar contended, that caste withstood the test of time and the attempt to reform the caste system was bound to fail.

Hierarchical Stratification in Caste[12]

The caste system is not an uncomplicated division of privileged and are marginalized people, but it is a carefully arranged system of inequality with every caste being ranked on a complex hierarchy of priority and lowliness. Since the Brahmins are at the top, they have a claim to religious as well as ritual influence followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas who have their own play of dominance. And below the Shudras are the Dalits, or Untouchables, who are traditionally assigned menial work, and who are denied entry to mean streets and the possibility of social upwards mobility. At the base are the "untouchables" or Dalits who have no rights even to minimal rights of social participation. Reflecting back to this stratification, Ambedkar stated that this was not a random design but meticulously created in order to present inequality at all walks of life such that no group was free of the hierarchy. Such logic of graded inequality therefore resulted in a scenario whereby oppression was dispersed, as one caste enjoyed superiority over another.

Lack of Solidarity Among the Oppressed[13]

The important implication of graded inequality as was pointed out by Ambedkar was that there was no way to resist collectively. In societies, the oppressed will form alliance to face off the oppressor. In India, however, the caste system divided the oppressed into warring subsets. Shudras are an example as they were discriminated by the upper castes but they also discriminated against the Dalits by subjecting them to untouchability. With the Dalits too sub-castes were born who tried to protect their status relative to those around. This absence of solidarity according to Ambedkar was the strongest point against social change. In the genius of caste system was the fact that it helped in failing to establish unity among the exploited; thus, its proficiency in sustaining itself. Such understanding separated Ambedkar and his approach to caste with that of other reformers who tended to downplay the divisive essence of caste.

Religious Sanction for Inequality[14]

It's not only had graded inequality been a social practice, but it was also a religiously permitted doctrine argued by Ambedkar. Caste structures and caste roles were explicitly written out in Hindu scriptures including Manu Smriti and

Dharma shastras which made them seem to be divine in origin. Religion justified and continued the system since people were presented with plausible explanations of why inequality is a God-given practice. It is this religious basis which Ambedkar found deeply detrimental and according to him, so long as caste was held in the religious order, then only the influence of religion could help destroy it. He insisted that social justice necessitated a no-longer-religious paradigm that opposed graded inequality, and he eventually became a Buddhist as a more egalitarian model.

Social and Economic Consequences[15]

This reasoning of inequality of grade had economic and social repercussions. Educational and job opportunities along with access to political power were limited to different caste groups with the upper caste hoarding access to resources and the lower, subjected to labour exploitation. Untouchables were not allowed to use land, draw water in common wells and schools. Those who could have lower access to information and higher occupations were huddas, although somewhat better positioned, whereas those who could not were huddas. According to Ambedkar, this system resulted in a cycle of deprivation that prevented one to determine what one wanted to do in life in terms of occupation or how to live since one was predestined in terms of caste that would determine his dignity and self-worth. Unlike in other societies where social mobility between classes took place, caste-based inequality was inheritable and irreversible making it one of the most unbending social strata in the history of humankind.

Psychological Dimension of Graded Inequality[16]

Ambedkar also focused on the psychological impacts of the stratification into castes. The caste system developed a stratification of value and therefore created superiority and inferiority complexes which were further reinforced by each other. Superior castes naturalized their dominance and inferior castes naturalized their subordination. This psychological deprivation was just as harmful as material one as it undermined self-esteem and made people develop a feeling of fate regarding their social identities. Ambedkar claimed that dehumanization as a result of caste was a distinctive attribute of graded inequality because this very process preconditioned consciousness of individuals taking the course of rebellion as impossible.

Caste as the Antithesis of Democracy[17]

The Ambedkar this graded inequality could not be reconciled at all with democracy. A culture rooted in hereditary rule was incapable of supporting the tenets of the liberty, equality and fraternity. Political democracy however even with universal suffrage would not lead to social democracy as long as caste continued to determine day to day life. The political institutions could never be fruitful, he cautioned, in a society that treated citizens with a graded inequality, denying most citizens parity in status and a corresponding role in decision-making. Therefore, he considered the end of caste a pre requisite to the existence of Indian democracy.

The notion of caste as a hierarchy of inequality underlines the fact that caste is hard to eradicate because its persistence is the result of gradations within the system. By contrasting the unusual form of stratification, non-solidarity of the oppressed, religious ratification of hierarchy and psychological aspects of discrimination, Ambedkar has provided a wholesome critique, which is still valid in the contemporary discussions. To him graded inequality was not an idiosyncrasy of society but its quintessence in caste. It had thus to be abolished by the complete destruction of caste itself. It is only when this hierarchical order is destroyed that India can reach the goals of justice, equality and fraternity that are all featured in its Constitution, Ambedkar argued.

The Constitutional Vision of Social Justice

The process leading to the framing of the Indian Constitution was a landmark event that sought remedy to centuries of marginalisation, inequalities and oppression with the help of a modern democratic version of the Constitution. At the centre of such an image of vision was the meaning of social justice, as championed by its Chairman, B.R. Ambedkar. Political independence would have divided meaning to Ambedkar unless it actualized the lives of stigmatized populations who were oppressed and left to suffer because of caste hierarchy, living in poor economic conditions, and secluded. It was not, however, a case of merely putting in place representative institutions as the constitutional project was also bound up with a rethinking of moral and social contours of Indian society. Social justice was to dictate the spirit in ensuring liberty, equality and

fraternity were more than mere ideals but became lived experiences by the citizens.

Social Justice as a Foundational Principle[18]

Social justice is found in the Constitution of India, which curbs economic extremes by classifying quality education and economic policies into four goals, which include equal opportunity, economic equality, non-discrimination and freedom of movement. This undertaking can be seen on the very Preamble itself as it promises "Justice, social, economic and political." The framers by prioritizing social justice gave reckoning to the fact that political democracy alone was not capable of producing a just society unless there were structural transformations to correct the deep rooted inequalities. Ambedkar repeatedly made the point that the full content of democracy was more than voting rights; it included dignity and representation of the previously marginalized social groups. Therefore, the Constitution was created as a tool of social revolution because it aimed to reverse centuries of discrimination.

Fundamental Rights as Guarantees of Equality[19]

The conception of social justice was built in the structure of fundamental rights which specify that all people are equal before the law (Article 14), not to be discriminated against on any grounds (Article 15) and that untouchability is forbidden (Article 17). Such provisions challenged the very premises of the caste exclusion. Ambedkar considered Article 17, which does away with untouchability, as a revolutionary article since it was aimed at grossing at the roots of the caste system. Article 15(4) also granted the state the authority to give special provisions to the socially and educationally backward classes, thus affirmative action was embedded into the constitution. Altogether, these rights symbolized liberation against the past where caste defined an individual right to resource and opportunity. They reflected the beliefs of Ambedkar that constitutional law was to stand in defence of the weak against established the hierarchies of society.

Directive Principles and the Moral Vision of the State[20]

The Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV), other than specifying the basic rights of all citizens under the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) also told us the path on which to work to achieve social and economic justice. Articles 38 and 46, more specifically compel the state to raise the well-being of the people and guard the instructional and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and inferior categories. These are non-justiciable, but they indicate the demand of Ambedkar that the state should actively play a role in redressing structural disadvantages. They also indicated ethical concern of bringing Indian society to a situation of equality and fraternity. To Ambedkar the Directive Principles were the conscience of the Constitution, as a reminder to the future governments of their duty to the marginalized.

Reservation as an Instrument of Social Justice[21]

There was probably nothing more tangible representation of the constitutional outlook on social justice by Ambedkar than the inclusion of reservations in educational institutions, occupation, and political representation. The Constitution also signalled the need to readdress hundreds of years of discrimination by including the condition that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes be given reservations in the legislatures (Articles 330 and 332) and ensuring that affirmative action was practiced in the state services and educational institutions. When such measures were not taken, according to Ambedkar, democracy would, in fact, be a nominal one since marginalized groupings would neither have a voice nor the resources to compete on an equal footing. Reservation was, therefore, not to be seen as short-term admissibility but as a tool to ensure substantive parity by turning the playing field level.

Balancing Equality and Social Justice[22]

The main characteristic of the Constitution is such an endeavour to balance formal equality and substantive justice. Although Articles 14 and 16 guarantee the equality of opportunity, there are provisions of reasonable classification and affirmative action. This corresponds to the subtle idea aroused by Ambedkar that inequality can be achieved by granting equals. Thus, the state was justified to implement variable measures to uplift the depressed communities. Equality in the thought of Ambedkar did not imply equal treatment, but fair treatment, which assumed the different positions of the start. According to the flexible structure of the Constitution, policies that could keep up with the changing needs of the marginalized elements could be formulated.

Democracy Rooted in Fraternity[23]

Ambedkar cautioned on numerous occasions that without social democracy, political democracy would not be effective. He describes social democracy as a style of life predicated on liberty, equality, and fraternity. The vision of social justice in the Constitution, hence, could not be viewed as distinct from the building of fraternity among citizens. Unless they abolished the caste hierarchies, Ambedkar claimed that fraternity would be a mere phantasm. Social justice incorporated into the provisions of the constitution were designed by him as a means of providing the foundation of a society in which fraternity would thrive based on the recognition that everyone was equal in his or her status and rights.

The scope and the intent of this vision of social justice as brought out by Ambedkar in the constitution were revolutionary. It did not only aim at the ensuring formal rights but it was also needed to change the very structures of the Indian society which had reinforced caste-based exclusion. The Constitution offered a system of short-term security through enforceable rights as well as more gradual change through the directive principles and affirmative action. The peculiar pre-eminences of Ambedkar was that he made social justice to be a governing morality of the Indian state so that generations to come would be a part of that incomplete project of equality. In our times, when the debate on reservation and affirmative action continues, his vision in the constitution can serve as a reminder that without social justice as its corner-stone, the concept of the democracy cannot possibly exist.

Ambedkar's Rationale for Reservation

Ambedkar supported reservation based on his in-depth comprehension of caste as an institution of extreme exclusion that deprived vast segments of Indian society of the equality of opportunity and of dignity. It was not the issue of stopping untouchability or bringing about token gestures of reform but the process of reorganizing access to power, resources and representation that was the struggle against caste in his view. Unless structural systems changed, he was of the view that the historically disadvantaged were doomed to be forever at the periphery of history, especially the Scheduled Castes. according to Ambedkar reservation was not a benefit discoursed on to the suppressed but a system with constitutional sanction which was to help remedy the evils of social injustice[24]. It was a system to guarantee that democracy was not the prerogative of the upper castes but it betrayed the hopes of all classes of people. Among the most effective characteristics that were presented in Ambedkar were those on representation. He stated that democracy was not all about numerical majority alone but the inclusion of all groups in the decision-making processes being an effective one. Instead of an electoral system founded on the principle of majority rule only, in a caste-ridden society in which power was historically monopolized, a system based on majority rule only would not be a formula likely to yield fair results to marginalized groups. Unless structural safeguards were instituted, social dominance and economic resources of the upper castes were still going to dominate legislatures and administration. To Ambedkar the system of reservations of seats in the legislatures and recruitment in public employment and educational institutions was essential to guarantee that the voices of the oppressed found a role in the governance[25]. In the absence of such representation, he cautioned that democracy would just be on the surface with the marginal waiting to become perennial subjects instead of full-fledged citizens.

Ambedkar also did not agree that the opportunity in a highly unequal society could be based only on merit. He explained that centuries of denial of access to education, owning land and property and respectable jobs had made the marginal groups lack the tools to compete on the same level[26]. Demanding merit without respect to these factors of historical disadvantage would in his view amount to a distortion of equality itself. The actual merit would only be in place when people were not favoured but provided with equal opportunities and resources in advancing their talents. Reservation, thus, did not contradict merit but was prerequisite of merit. After opening the doors of education and work to marginalized groups, the policy sought to generate environments in which they can express their talents, thus benefit the national scale.

Another aspect of Ambedkar reasoning was the perspective of justice being remedial as well as mutating. Restorative justice was translating into redressing the historical wrongs that had been inflicted on the oppressed groups of the population, which had been deprived of the fundamental human rights throughout centuries. Transformation justice, in its turn, meant the establishment of circumstances under which caste would cease to be a determinant of opportunity and status in the future[27]. This idea of Reservation was not an interim arrangement of charity but a long-term reform project of society. In the absence of

such steps, Ambedkar made it clear that the end of caste would just be a pipedream, since ingrained inequalities could only be undone through legal actions that legalize equality.

Reservation, Ambedkar also knew, would also attract criticism of a most serious nature, the very aspect of developing separation or providing dependency. His response to this was that these criticisms failed to take cognizance of the structural reality of Indian society, which had already compartmented of caste severing the people into fixed pieces. Reservation did not bring about divisions; it was only trying to fix them by providing opportunity to people who were systematically denied it. Far from creating a dependency scenario it was a way of giving power to the marginal peoples to become members of equal societies and take part in the public domain. According to the arguments put forward by Ambedkar, the aim of reservations was not to maintain the fundamental difference but rather to reach the stage when the caste could no longer be a determinant of a person's position in society. When that day came, though, he argued they had to be reserved to the health of Indian democracy.

By associating dignity and self-respect with reservation, Ambedkar had gone beyond the rhetoric of tangible advantages. He knew that stigmatization had denied marginalized groups economic resources but also helped to diminish their humanity[28]. Indeed, reservation allowed these communities to restore their dignity and their right in the society by a representation in the institutions of power and education. The economic dimension was no less significant than the psychological and symbolic one by Ambedkar. Reservation in his view was meant to help achieve his vision of social justice whereby none should be subordinated to another person or a community.

Finally, as one can see, the background of reservation can be found in the grandibus perspective of Ambedkar of democracy and constitutional morality. He thought that freedom, equality, and fraternity cannot be prosperous in a society where caste decides whereabouts. Reservation was therefore, not an exception to the rules of equality but an expression of equality. It was a departure to get out of formal equality, in which there is a level playing field, to substantive equality in which historical preferences are considered and redressed. The idea behind incorporating reservation in the constitutional text was to make sure that Indian democracy did not simply represent the nature of hierarchies but rather would work out the gradual transition of such hierarchies towards a more just and dignified vision of the world. His arguments still are very timely in modern-day times where there is still caste influence on who gains access to opportunities even with decades of affirmative action. It is not a dispensable policy, Ambedkar remodels into our minds till the time equality is established on substantive terms in the country there is a need of reservation in the constitution.

Reservation as a Tool for Equality and Representation

The issue of equality, as it is embodied in the Constitution of India can hardly be talked about without considering the historical and social contexts of caste discrimination. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar did not conceive of reservation as a welfare program, but as a tool of transformation that will make equality meaningful, in terms of being substantive rather than formal. Reservation was thus conceived and intended to address huge inequalities between the dominant and the marginalized as well as to increase the democratization of access to knowledge, livelihood and representation.

Historical Context of Inequality[29]

Hundreds of years ago, the caste-based society denied Dalits, Adivasis, and other low castes access to social, economic, and cultural opportunities. Such exclusions were not some coincidences but were institutionalized in the graded caste system. Such being the situation, Ambedkar believed that formal equality alone would not be sufficient because corrective action is needed to ensure that past disadvantages are undone. Reservation has come out as the tool that was needed to level the playing field that always favoured upper castes.

Reservation and Educational Opportunities[30]

Liberation from oppression through education was according to Ambedkar the key. Yet, caste restriction excluded much of society to learning in the past. The reservation in academic institutions introduced the advantage of playing the field by granting untampered students a chance to venture in academic life, acquire expertise and compete in the professional realm. This access to knowledge did not only improve the personal development but also empowered whole communities.

Employment and Economic Representation[31]

Caste has not only served to cut-off education, but has also curtailed occupational options. The affirmative action in public employment also assured that the people who historically faced marginalization got admissions to the state systems which did not welcome them. Reservation not only brought about economic stability but also gave a symbolic recognition since it enabled one to acquire government jobs. It broke monopolies of dominant castes in government departments and made the administration diverse.

Political Empowerment and Voice[32]

Ambedkar felt that when it comes to real democracy, it has to be embrative representation. Political reservation, therefore, was important so that they could have their voices in legislative houses to represent the Dalits, Adivasis and other downtrodden sections. To the contrary, without such mechanisms their interests would be rendered inexistent in governance. Political reservation ensured that the policies would be made to aggrandize the needs of all the citizens and not that of the privileged classes.

Addressing Structural Inequalities[33]

Reservation was never seen as a stop-gap measure of charity but as corrective structure. This is because as Ambedkar viewed it, centuries of subjugation led to institutionally entrenched inequalities that could not be eradicated by making empty assertions about equality. Through the provision of representation in all spheres of life, namely education, employment, and politics, reservation provided a straightforward solution to structural socioeconomic obstacles, as well as social mobility to disadvantaged populations.

Criticism and Misinterpretations[34]

Reservation has also been misinterpreted as reverse discrimination even though it was formed with the sole purpose of emancipating. Its opponents say that it compromises meritocracy. Ambedkar, however, did not agree to the indifference of merit out of social implications. To him reservation was not of lowering standards but giving various opportunities to those who were always denied a chance to exhibit their potentiality.

Reservation as Democratic Justice[35]

Democracy as envisaged by Ambedkar did not lie in the rule of the majority, but in the safeguarding of minorities. Reservation therefore was democratic stipulation. It led to social justice, because it dictated that the government, schools and administration was a representation of the society, and not a perpetuation of caste monopolies.

Reservation was the truest example of equality as envisaged by Ambedkar. It was out to change a society that was based on exclusion to one that was emblematic of fairness, representation, and dignity. Instead of being a privilege, reservation under the constitution has been a sort of anti-tool of breaking historical hierarchies and achievement of substantive equality. In this regard, it continues to play a definitive role in the quest of India to achieve authentic social justice and an inclusive democracy.

Critiques and Misinterpretations of Reservation Policy

At the same time, the policy of reservations in India should not be understood as a welfare policy but a structural policy in a bid to remedy the historical injustice. Nevertheless, it has been the subject of continuous criticisms and misunderstandings despite its legitimacy as spelled by the constitution. Reservations are perceived by many critics as reverse discrimination, or as a block to meritocracy and at the other extreme some describe reservation as a political weapon and not social justice. To judge these criticisms, it is imperative to identify the extent to which many have been developed by misconceptions of the nature and focus of reservation.

Misconception of Reverse Discrimination[36]

The best-known objection is that reservation is meant to discriminate in favor of the socially rather backward classes thereby continuing the injustice. Its critics hold that it discriminates unduly against members of upper caste as it deprives them of opportunities. Nevertheless, such an interpretation does not consider that reservation is not supposed to act as a punishment but as a tool in equalizing the

playing ground of communities that have long been excluded in education, employment, and governance. Quantitative equality as put forward by Ambedkar focused on substantive and not formal equality is the actual constitutional mandate.

Reservation and the Meritocracy Debate[37]

Another misconception which is much bigger is that reservation is a threat to meritocracy. Critics say that the reservation of quotas to admit or promote people undermines standards of excellence. However, such a claim makes the assumption that merit can be considered in isolation even when caste privilege has traditionally influenced who has access to quality education, access to recourses, and networks. Ambedkar argued that there is no paradox between social justice and merit and indeed only through the removal of systemic obstacles can merit prevail.

Perception of Reservation as a Political Bargain[38]

Reservation is also the method of political tactic used rather than as a true tool of social change. Political parties are alleged to have used it as an avenue of gaining vote banks. Although part of the basis of reservation demands may be politically far-fetched, the basis of it as being constitutional has not been nullified. Rather, it underscores the importance of more resolute protection and transparent structures so that reservation can be in line with its constitutive objective of social justice.

Misinterpretation of Reservation as Permanent Privilege[39]

One of the most popular misperceptions is that reservation entitles some communities with permanent privileges. Critics overlook the fact that it is a corrective action that will carry on until discriminated groups reach the same standards of social and economic status. In fact, reservation was a transient feature that could and should be done away with when equality was achieved- Ambedkar himself dreamt of doing so. The fact that caste discrimination persists, however, goes to show that the circumstances necessitating the reservation are still widespread.

Most of the fodder of critiques and misinterpreting of reservation policy emanates by not taking serious note of the structural aspect of caste oppression. By equating reservation to reversed discrimination, or by couching it as attack on meritocracy, critics misrepresent the nature of anomaly correctives of decades of deprivation. The reservation according to the vision of Ambedkar was at the centre of the constitutional process of social justice in which the government guarantees representation and equality to the disadvantaged. Keeping the above critiques in mind, the philosophical bases of reservation as a timebound and necessarily transient strategy to fill institutional lapses and eventually achieve the much-desired and very egalitarian society, needs to be reasserted.

Contemporary Relevance of Ambedkar's Thought

The intellectual work of B.R. Ambedkar had managed to stay right to the center of socio-political discourse within India in the twenty-first-century. His understanding of critique of caste, promotion of constitutionalism and emphasis on social democracy is not only topical to his period, but has gained a greater connotation in present times. The continuing caste-based exclusionary practices, arguments about affirmative action, and the fight over equal representation reveal the contemporary urgency of going back to the ideas of Ambedkar. His reflection does not only give a moral model of justice but also practical mechanisms of solving structural disparities in contemporary India.

Persistence of Caste Discrimination[40]

Caste remains an important determinant of access to resources, education and employment despite constitutional protection. The ongoing caste-related incidences of violence and discrimination indicate that the caution exercised by Ambedkar over the issue of graded inequality in Indian society has not been ended yet. His call of destruction of caste still echoes with the current Dalit protests and social struggles.

Affirmative Action and Representation[41]

His writings regarding the system of reservation to gain representation in the spheres of education, administration, and politics have a leg in the current policies of affirmative action in India. The rationale of equality and

acknowledgment of historical injustice has been one of the primary influences in determining a way forward in the discourse whether the reservation system needs to be continued or should be restructured still.

Social Justice in the Era of Globalization[42]

The new inequalities brought by globalization are based on the differences of classes, technologies, and market accessibility but caste has been intersected with disadvantages. The concept of social justice advanced by Ambedkar that is based on political as well as economic democracy points to a direction on creating the balance between high economic growth and equitable distribution.

Ambedkar and Constitutional Morality[43]

India is always challenged by democratic institutions through majoritarian politics, communal tensions and flouting constitutional principles. In terms of constitutional morality, Ambedkar made a pertinent point, which reminds us that the democracies cannot rely only on the existence of political institutions, but on the upholding of constitutional values as well.

Gender and Intersectionality[44]

Ambedkar was among the first theorists to emphasise the connection between the concepts of caste and gender, especially in the writings relating to the condition of Dalit women. It is only in recent feminist thought, where increased consideration has been given to the concept of intersectionality, that Ambedkar presents a sense of thought, that can be used to formulate a conception of varied forms of inequality and the consequent need to create comprehensive reforms.

Global Relevance of Ambedkar's Ideas[45]

Ambedkar is not limited as a fighter against racial, ethnic and economic discrimination in India; his vision applies to secular issues everywhere. His resonance with the ideas of equality, dignity and fraternity also corresponds with modern standards of human rights practices, so his ideas become relevant to the discussions of justice and democracy on the international scale.

The applicability of the thought of Ambedkar to modern day life is trans-historical in the sense that this thought always keeps equality, dignity, and justice at the centre. His criticism of the caste system and support of structural upheavals continue to be critical in the resolution of social hierarchies persisting in the society, and his defence of constitutional morality stands to guide the continent towards protecting the democracy. Ambedkar can still show the way towards a just and inclusive society in India where inequality and other forms of exclusion are grappling with the nation.

Conclusion

The intellectual and political legacy of B.R. Ambedkar has remained a reference point to make sense of the caste discrimination and the need to have structural solutions like reservation in India. The acute critique of the caste system as a highly institutionalized framework of graded inequality showed that this form of oppression was not just economically enforced but also on cultural, religious or political grounds. By stressing that without eliminating these hierarchies one could not have social justice, it is the constitutional order that Ambedkar envisaged based on equality, liberty, and fraternity. In this vision, reservation was not an issue of benevolence or short-term support but a constitutional right that would help to right the wrongs of history and usher traditionally disadvantaged communities to education, jobs, and political life.

The controversies on reservation both in and after the times of Ambedkar, indicate the conflict between formal and substantive equality. The rationale behind what Ambedkar proposed was that there would never be a fair competition among the oppressed and transformed socially, then the historically privileged groups. Reservation has clearly facilitated mobility, representation and dignity of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, etc. over the decades. However, persistent resistance and misinterpretations of reservation-as reverse discrimination, or as permanent entitlements-notice the continuing aversion of certain sections of society to face up to the structural persistence of caste inequalities.

In the contemporary background, where the discrimination of the caste prevails in more or less latent and explicit forms, the thought of Ambedkar continues to be really important. The reservation policy has succeeded in making the democracy more open but its effectiveness should also be measured by the level of societal change that it achieves. The bigger vision that Ambedkar was having was not confined in the mere representation but in also creating the conditions where documentation can fade away such needs in future by embracing fraternity. As

long as there is no ideal society, reservation needs to be considered as a tool of justice because, as Ambedkar believed, the social democracy must be pursued in the context of political democracy.

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