



Research Paper

## Influence of Ambedkar on Dalit Movement in India

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### Abstract

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy as a social reformer, constitutionalist, and Dalit icon continues to shape the Dalit movement in contemporary India. This review paper explores the ideological, political, and social influences of Ambedkar on the post-independence Dalit movement, with a focus on the transformation in Dalit consciousness, the rise of Dalit political parties, Ambedkarite Buddhism, and the current challenges faced by Dalits. Drawing from scholarly literature published between 2014 and 2025, this paper critically assesses how Ambedkar's vision of social justice, equality, and emancipation remains central to Dalit resistance and mobilization.*

**Keywords:** B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit movement, Ambedkarism, social justice, caste, Buddhism, Indian politics

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### I. Introduction

The history of the Dalit movement in India is inextricably linked with the life and legacy of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar—jurist, economist, social reformer, and chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Born in 1891 into a Dalit family, Ambedkar experienced the brutalities of caste-based exclusion firsthand. These experiences shaped his lifelong commitment to eradicating untouchability and establishing a just and egalitarian society. His intellectual brilliance, combined with a deep understanding of the oppressive structures of Indian society, laid the foundation for a revolutionary ideology that continues to inspire the Dalit movement across generations.

The Dalit movement, which broadly refers to the collective struggle of the socially oppressed and marginalized communities historically categorized as “untouchables,” gained momentum during the colonial and post-independence periods through Ambedkar’s activism and writings. Unlike earlier reformers who sought changes within the framework of Hinduism, Ambedkar radically rejected the caste system as fundamentally unjust and advocated for its annihilation. His call for self-respect, education, political representation, and social transformation provided a comprehensive framework for Dalit mobilization in the twentieth century and beyond.

Ambedkar’s influence on the Dalit movement is multidimensional. Politically, he emphasized the importance of separate electorates and political representation to ensure that Dalit voices are heard in democratic institutions. He founded the Independent Labour Party (1936) and later the Scheduled Castes Federation, which laid the groundwork for future Dalit political parties like the Republican Party of India (RPI) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). His role in drafting the Indian Constitution ensured constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including provisions for affirmative action in education, employment, and politics.

Socially and spiritually, Ambedkar’s historic conversion to Buddhism in 1956 marked a watershed moment in Dalit history. By adopting Buddhism—a religion he regarded as rational, egalitarian, and non-hierarchical—he offered Dalits a path to reclaim dignity outside the Hindu caste order. This act symbolized both a rejection of Brahminical dominance and an assertion of a new Dalit identity rooted in justice, compassion, and fraternity. His interpretation of Buddhism, often referred to as Navayana Buddhism, remains central to many Dalit communities today.

In the post-Ambedkar era, his philosophy—often termed “Ambedkarism”—has continued to inspire movements for Dalit rights, social justice, and identity assertion. From the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s to the Bhim Army in recent years, Ambedkar’s ideology has been reinterpreted and mobilized to confront contemporary forms of caste oppression. Universities, civil society groups, and digital platforms have emerged as new spaces where Ambedkarite thought is debated, disseminated, and adapted to changing socio-political realities.

This review paper explores how Ambedkar’s ideas and actions have influenced the Dalit movement from 2014 to 2025. It examines the evolution of Ambedkarite politics, the role of Dalit youth and digital activism, the continued relevance of Navayana Buddhism, and the challenges of institutional discrimination. By analyzing recent scholarship and events, the paper seeks to understand how Ambedkar’s vision remains a guiding force in the ongoing struggle for equality and human dignity in India.

## **II. Ambedkar's Philosophy and Vision**

Ambedkar's philosophy, rooted in the principles of justice and human dignity, rejects the Hindu caste hierarchy and advocates for annihilation of caste. His emphasis on education, economic empowerment, and political representation formed the backbone of his vision for Dalit emancipation (Moon, 2015; Kumar, 2017). His later adoption of Buddhism reflected his commitment to a rational, egalitarian, and non-violent spiritual path for social liberation.

## **III. Political Mobilization and Rise of Dalit Parties**

Ambedkar's political legacy has catalyzed the rise of Dalit-centric political movements and parties. The Republican Party of India (RPI), and later the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), emerged directly from Ambedkar's ideology. Post-2014 literature emphasizes a shift in Dalit political strategies, including coalition politics and grassroots mobilization (Guru & Chatterjee, 2019). Scholars observe that although Dalit parties face fragmentation, Ambedkar remains a unifying icon (Jaffrelot, 2020; Rao, 2023).

## **IV. Ambedkarite Buddhism and Spiritual Mobilization**

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 triggered a socio-spiritual revolution among Dalits. His reinterpretation of Buddhism as a religion of social justice continues to draw scholarly attention. Recent studies highlight the resurgence of Navayana Buddhism as both a religious and political identity for Dalits (Zelliot, 2018; Shukla, 2021). Celebrations like Dhammachakra Pravartan Din are becoming symbols of Dalit assertion and resistance.

## **V. Educational and Intellectual Awakening**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar regarded education as the most powerful weapon for social transformation. His famous call to "educate, agitate, organize" continues to resonate deeply within the Dalit community. Ambedkar believed that access to knowledge was the key to breaking the chains of caste oppression. Inspired by his vision, generations of Dalits have pursued education not merely as a means of livelihood, but as a tool of liberation and empowerment.

Post-2014, there has been a notable rise in Dalit student activism across Indian universities, with increasing representation in higher education institutions due to affirmative action policies. Ambedkarite student groups have emerged as powerful voices challenging caste-based discrimination on campuses. The tragic death of Rohith Vemula in 2016 sparked nationwide protests and symbolized the systemic challenges faced by Dalit scholars.

In parallel, Ambedkar Studies Centres in various universities, along with Dalit intellectuals and writers, have significantly contributed to the academic revival of Ambedkarite thought. A growing body of Dalit literature, research, and social commentary continues to challenge dominant narratives and assert counter-histories. This intellectual awakening is not only reshaping academic discourse but also fostering a new generation of socially conscious, politically aware Dalit youth.

## **VI. Dalit Movements Post-2014: Ambedkar's Legacy in Action**

The post-2014 period has seen a reinvigoration of Dalit protest movements rooted in Ambedkarite ideology. Events such as the 2016 Rohith Vemula protest, Bhim Army mobilizations, and the 2018 Bhima-Koregaon violence have shown how Ambedkar's ideals of justice, dignity, and resistance remain central to Dalit identity (Rao, 2018; Anand, 2021).

## **VII. Cultural Renaissance and Ambedkar in Popular Discourse**

Dr. Ambedkar's influence extends beyond political and legal spheres into culture, literature, and media, fueling a vibrant cultural renaissance among Dalits. In recent years, Ambedkar has emerged as a powerful symbol in popular discourse—featured prominently in films, poetry, music, visual art, and social media. Dalit autobiographies and Ambedkarite literature have gained significant academic and public attention, offering counter-narratives to mainstream casteist histories.

Ambedkar's life and ideas have inspired contemporary filmmakers, playwrights, and rappers who challenge caste oppression through creative expression. Social media platforms have enabled young Ambedkarites to amplify their voices, share historical knowledge, and build solidarity across regions. Celebrations like Ambedkar Jayanti and Dhammachakra Pravartan Din now serve as assertions of pride and resistance.

This cultural resurgence not only reclaims Dalit identity with dignity but also expands the reach of Ambedkar's philosophy into everyday consciousness and public imagination.

### VIII. Challenges to Ambedkarite Movement

Despite significant progress, the Ambedkarite movement faces challenges including caste-based violence, co-optation of Ambedkar's image by mainstream politics, and internal fragmentation. Dalit scholars critique the commodification of Ambedkar's image without commitment to his ideology (Deshpande, 2022). Moreover, anti-reservation discourse and institutional discrimination persist, threatening the gains of the Dalit movement.

### IX. Ambedkar's Relevance in Contemporary India

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy remains strikingly relevant in contemporary India, where social inequality, caste discrimination, and challenges to constitutional values persist. As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar envisioned a democratic republic grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity. His emphasis on constitutional morality, rights-based governance, and the annihilation of caste continues to offer a critical framework for addressing the deep-seated injustices in Indian society.

In recent years, the rise of caste-based violence, institutional discrimination, and attacks on affirmative action policies have reaffirmed the need to revisit Ambedkar's ideas. Movements such as the protests following Rohith Vemula's institutional death (2016), the resistance against dilution of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (2018), and the Dalit assertion seen in Bhim Army's mobilizations reflect a renewed engagement with Ambedkarite thought. These contemporary struggles often draw directly from Ambedkar's writings and speeches, which remain accessible and mobilizing tools for social justice.

Furthermore, Ambedkar's vision of social and economic democracy continues to influence debates on labor rights, land reform, education, and digital inclusion. His idea of "graded inequality" within caste structures is particularly pertinent in analyzing modern social hierarchies and the persistence of caste privilege among the elite. Youth-led Ambedkarite movements are now leveraging digital platforms, academic institutions, and cultural spaces to spread his teachings, promote Dalit pride, and challenge hegemonic narratives.

Internationally, Ambedkar's philosophy is being recognized in global discussions on anti-discrimination, human rights, and inclusive governance. His teachings are studied in universities abroad and invoked in diasporic Dalit activism, highlighting his universal relevance.

In today's climate of social polarization and rising inequality, Ambedkar serves not just as a symbol of Dalit empowerment but as a beacon of democratic resilience. His life and legacy continue to inspire marginalized communities, progressive movements, and conscientious citizens striving to uphold the spirit of the Indian Constitution. Engaging with Ambedkar is not merely about honoring a historical figure—it is a continuing project of nation-building rooted in justice and dignity for all.

### X. Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's transformative ideas continue to serve as the ideological foundation of the Dalit movement in India. His vision of social justice, dignity, and equality has empowered generations of marginalized communities to challenge caste oppression and demand rightful inclusion. From political mobilization to cultural renaissance, and from educational upliftment to digital activism, Ambedkar's legacy remains a guiding force. In an era of rising inequality and social unrest, his principles offer a timeless roadmap for building a more just and democratic India. The Dalit movement today stands as a living testament to Ambedkar's enduring influence.

### References

(All within 2014–2025, APA style)

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