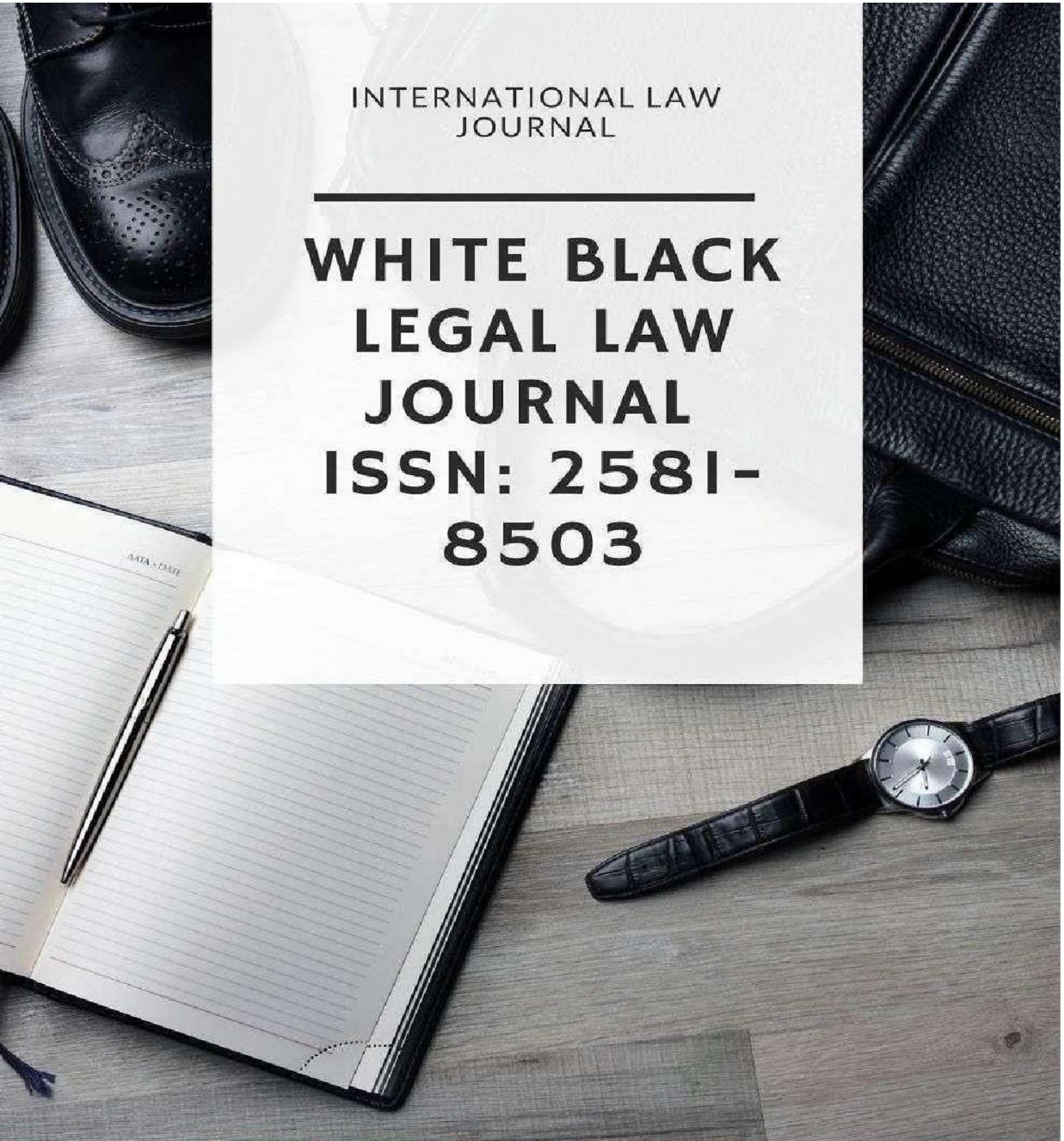




INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL

**WHITE BLACK
LEGAL LAW
JOURNAL
ISSN: 2581-
8503**

Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal

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**DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR: ARCHITECT OF THE
CONSTITUTION AND THE ENDURING STRUGGLE FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE (A STUDY OF HIS CONSTITUTIONAL,
SOCIAL, AND INTELLECTUAL LEGACY IN MODERN
INDIA)**

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Abstract

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), has played an important role in the history of modern India through being not only one of the primary architects of the Indian Constitution but also an advocate for anti-caste movement. This paper combines and integrates the different contributions of Dr. Ambedkar in the areas of constitution, society, economy, and ideology into one analysis. It is argued that Dr. Ambedkar's significance cannot be confined to the symbolic representation in the form of statues and memorials or even the celebration of his birthday but must be viewed in terms of the actual mission of changing a society based on caste system into a society of liberty, equality, and fraternity. His intellectual development, his influence by Jyotiba Phule, his involvement in the drafting of the Constitution and its continuing impact on Indian law, his support for gender justice and economic development, and the factors behind the increasing importance of Dr. Ambedkar in the 1980s and 1990s are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: B.R. Ambedkar, Indian Constitution, social justice, caste, equality, social democracy, women's empowerment, Jyotiba Phule.

1. Introduction: Relevance in Modern India

Dr. Ambedkar stands as a central pillar in the making of modern India. He was not only the chief architect of the Indian Constitution but also a strong advocate of democratic values who helped shape the nation around the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.¹ In an era

¹ These three principles are expressly invoked in the Preamble to the Constitution of India, 1950, which Ambedkar

when social inequality and discrimination remain prevalent, his thought preserves a prominent significance.

In recent years, gratitude of Ambedkar has grown rapidly across the country. Governments and political parties present him as a national hero, a great reformer, and a protector of the marginalised. Yet society and the state often confine his legacy to symbolic gestures, reducing a dynamic thinker and social revolutionary to a mere icon. This paper takes the opposite approach as it seeks to understand Ambedkar substantively by amalgamating the several strands of his constitutional, social, economic, intellectual, and spiritual works into one intelligible account, and by asking what his vision demands of India today.

The essential argument is that Ambedkar consistently held political democracy to be unsustainable without social democracy.² A constitution, however carefully drafted, is for him not merely a legal document but an instrument for establishing justice in everyday social life. Reading his legacy through that lens reveals both how far India has travelled and how much of his mission remains unfinished.

2. From Struggle to Success: An Inspiring Journey

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh.³ Born into a Dalit family, he faced discrimination and social exclusion from an early age, yet never allowed these hardships to weaken his resolve. His father, Subedar Ramji, a follower of Kabir's teachings, impressed upon him a decisive lesson: to free the oppressed castes from social slavery, one must empower oneself through knowledge, for knowledge can only be countered with knowledge. Ambedkar made education the goal of his life.

His educational journey was filled with obstacles owing to untouchability and caste discrimination. In such a hostile environment, even passing matriculation was a remarkable achievement, and he was among the first from the so-called "untouchable" community to do so. He went on to pursue higher education at Columbia University and the London School

defended as an integrated trinity in his concluding address to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949.

² Ambedkar, addressing the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949: "political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy." See B.R. Ambedkar, *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. XI (1949).

³ Now officially Dr. Ambedkar Nagar (Mhow), Madhya Pradesh. Ambedkar was born into the Mahar community, then classified among the "untouchable" castes.

of Economics,⁴ where his academic training enabled him to analyse social problems in a scientific and rational manner.

Amusingly, his early academic record did not foreshadow his later greatness. In an interview published on 13 April 1947 in *Saptahik Navyug*, he recalled securing only a second division in his B.A. and scoring 223 out of 600 in his intermediate examinations, remarking that anyone predicting his future achievements from those results would have been thought mad.⁵ What set him apart was not marks but his choice of subjects, the depth of his research, and its relevance to society. That research would later inform the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India,⁶ and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has described Ambedkar as an important figure in the economics of poverty and social justice.⁷

3. Intellectual Foundations: The Legacy of Jyotiba Phule

Ambedkar regarded Mahatma Jyotiba Phule as his guru, placing him alongside the Buddha and Kabir as one of the three great influences on his life.⁸ Although the two never met, Phule died in 1890, a year before Ambedkar's birth, there was a deep intellectual connection between them. Phule was the first ideological leader to launch a sustained movement against the subjugation of Shudras, Atishudras, and women, guided by scientific thinking, secularism, and humanity.

3.1 Continuity of Struggle

The foundation for Ambedkar's historic Mahad Satyagraha of the 1920s which asserted the right of Dalits to draw water from public sources which had already been laid by Phule.⁹ In cities such as Pune, water tanks built during the Peshwa era remained inaccessible to Dalits even during severe shortages. In 1868, Phule opened his private water tank to Dalits despite

⁴ Ambedkar earned an M.A. (1915) and Ph.D. (1927) from Columbia University, and a D.Sc. in Economics from the London School of Economics (1923); he was also called to the Bar at Gray's Inn, London.

⁵ Attributed to an interview in *Saptahik Navyug*, 13 April 1947, as cited in the source essays. Readers should verify against the original publication.

⁶ The Reserve Bank of India (established 1935) was shaped in part by the recommendations of the Hilton Young Commission, which drew on Ambedkar's doctoral study *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1923).

⁷ Attribution to Amartya Sen appears in the source essays; the exact statement should be verified against Sen's published remarks before formal citation.

⁸ Ambedkar publicly named the Buddha, Kabir, and Jyotiba Phule as his three gurus. See B.R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?* (Bombay: Thacker & Co., 1946), dedication.

⁹ The Mahad Satyagraha (also Chavdar Tale Satyagraha) took place at Mahad, in present-day Raigad district, Maharashtra, in March and December 1927.

fierce backlash from orthodox society, awakening a sense of self-respect among communities long trapped in dependency.

Where Phule strongly criticised the *Manusmriti* for sanctioning inequality, Ambedkar went further and publicly burned it during the Mahad Satyagraha,¹⁰ and he opposed those who later sought to defend it. His critical analysis of religion was inspired by Phule. Just as Phule wrote *Gulamgiri* and *Asprushyanchi Kaifiyat* to expose the history of oppression, Ambedkar's *Who Were the Shudras?* reflects the same analytical approach. He dedicated the book to Phule calling him the "Greatest Shudra of Modern India."¹¹

3.2 Recognition and Independent Thought

When Pune Municipality installed statues of Tilak and Chiplunkar in 1924 but opposed a statue of Phule on grounds of caste bias, and legal cases were filed against those who defended Phule in print, Ambedkar himself stepped in to defend them when no other lawyer was willing. He also sought to write a comprehensive English biography of Phule, collecting his works and arranging handwritten copies from libraries when printed editions were unavailable.

Yet Ambedkar strongly opposed personality worship, believing it leads to dictatorship and social decline.¹² A disciple, he held, should not blindly follow a guru but should critically understand ideas and adopt them only if valid. Disagreement, for Ambedkar, was not ingratitude but a reflection of the independent thinking that a true guru inspires.

4. Constitution-Making: The Foundation of Democracy

As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Ambedkar played a decisive role in framing the Indian Constitution. He ensured the inclusion of fundamental rights, the directive principles of state policy, equality before the law, and the principles of social justice,¹³ and he worked to bring Scheduled Castes and backward classes into the national mainstream through affirmative measures. With deep study, foresight, and a commitment to national interest, he helped transform India into a sovereign, federal republic whose institutional strength continues to anchor the nation.

¹⁰ The public burning of the Manusmriti occurred on 25 December 1927 during the second phase of the Mahad Satyagraha.

¹¹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946), dedication to Mahatma Jotiba Fule.

¹² Compare Ambedkar's warning in his final Constituent Assembly address (25 November 1949) against "bhakti, or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship" in politics, which he called "a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship."

¹³ See especially Part III (Fundamental Rights) and Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) of the Constitution of India, 1950.

For Ambedkar, however, the success of any law depends on its implementation. Without an effective government and administrative system, he warned, even the best constitution can remain confined to paper.¹⁴ The Constitution created a strong legal and ideological framework prohibiting discrimination on grounds of caste, religion, or gender; realising that promise in everyday life required, and still requires, active state effort through welfare schemes and public institutions.

5. Ambedkar's Influence on Judicial Decisions

Even today, courts rely upon the constitutional principles Ambedkar embedded in the founding document. Four landmark decisions illustrate the enduring reach of his vision:

- *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), in which the Supreme Court established the "basic structure doctrine," protecting democracy and constitutional integrity from amendment.¹⁵
- *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), in which the Court expanded the meaning of personal liberty and recognised the right to live with dignity as a fundamental right.¹⁶
- *M. Nagaraj v. Union of India* (2006), in which the Court upheld constitutional provisions relating to reservation, strengthening the framework of social justice.¹⁷
- *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), in which the rights of the LGBTQ+ community were recognised, affirming equality and dignity for all.¹⁸

Taken together, these judgments reflect how Ambedkar's commitments to liberty, equality, and dignity continue to shape the interpretation of the Constitution decades after its adoption.

6. Women's Empowerment: The Expansion of Equality

Ambedkar was a consistent champion of women's rights. Addressing the Dalit Women's Conference in Nagpur on 20 July 1942, he declared that the progress of a society is measured by the progress of its women.¹⁹ As early as 1927 he had argued that, just as a household is managed jointly by husband and wife, social problems too must be solved collectively by men and women, acknowledging women as the creators of society.

¹⁴ Paraphrasing Ambedkar's observation that a constitution can be good or bad depending largely on those who work it. Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. XI (1949).

¹⁵ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, (1973) 4 SCC 225; AIR 1973 SC 1461.

¹⁶ *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*, (1978) 1 SCC 248; AIR 1978 SC 597.

¹⁷ *M. Nagaraj v. Union of India*, (2006) 8 SCC 212.

¹⁸ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1.

¹⁹ Attributed to Ambedkar's address at the All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference, Nagpur, 20 July 1942, as recounted in the source essays.

"In the modern age, property rights are essential for freedom. Until women are recognised as rightful heirs to property, their slavery will not end." by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, 25 December 1952

He was instrumental in drafting the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to give women rights relating to divorce, protection from polygamy, and equal inheritance. Although disagreements over the Bill led to his resignation from the cabinet in 1951,²⁰ that very sacrifice highlighted his unwavering commitment to the cause. Through the constitutional guarantees of Articles 14 to 16 he helped secure equality before the law, equal opportunity, and protection against social injustice,²¹ and he advocated maternity benefits, insisting that women receive rest before and after childbirth for the welfare of the nation.

At a time when several Western societies still debated whether women should vote, the Indian Constitution granted women equal rights alongside men is a mark of its progressive vision. Contemporary measures, from the Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) providing for one-third representation to the expansion of women's participation in governance, defence, and technology, can be read as continuing realisations of the foundation Ambedkar laid.²²

7. Economic Vision: Inclusive and Forward-Looking Development

Ambedkar promoted the concept of an inclusive economy which is based on equality. His major areas of concern included equitable distribution of resources, an active role for the government in economic planning, industrialization, labour reforms, etc.²³ His scholarly contributions to the issue of rupee and monetary issues were among those that contributed to the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India. Economic thoughts have close alignment with inclusive and sustainable development.

Central to this vision was the conviction that a nation cannot progress without uplifting its most marginalised and deprived sections. True national progress, for Ambedkar lays in ensuring that

²⁰ Ambedkar resigned as Law Minister on 27 September 1951, citing among other reasons the stalling of the Hindu Code Bill. Its provisions were later enacted piecemeal, including the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956.

²¹ Articles 14 (equality before law), 15 (prohibition of discrimination), and 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment), Constitution of India, 1950.

²² The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, popularly the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, provides for reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, subject to delimitation.

²³ See B.R. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities* (1947), which proposed "state socialism" in key industries and agriculture as a constitutional guarantee.

every individual the opportunity to live with dignity and such development must be rooted not in economic growth alone but in social justice and equality.

8. Buddhism: A Path of Social and Spiritual Renewal

In 1956, in the later phase of his life, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism, spreading a message of compassion, brotherhood, and equality.²⁴ This was not merely a religious conversion but a considered step toward social reform. By adopting the Buddhist values of equality, compassion, and fraternity, he offered millions a path to self-respect and dignified living, guided by the principle of *Bahujan Hitaya, Bahujan Sukhaya*—for the welfare and happiness of the many.

The conversion challenged the existing social order and presented an alternative cultural path, encouraging a move away from superstition toward rationality and equality. In doing so it strengthened social unity and gave his followers a durable foundation for continued struggle.

9. Know Ambedkar First, Then Accept Him: The Growth of Recognition

The full impact of Ambedkar's contributions became clearly visible only during the 1980s and 1990s. History did him justice, but late. During his lifetime his followers were not strong enough to organise the large movements and campaigns that build public reputation, and the society for which he fought was itself largely absent from the media. He was, moreover, inadequately represented in school and college curricula, so the general public could not fully grasp his ideas.

Change came from the ground up. The rights he secured for marginalised communities through the Constitution—free education, scholarships, hostel facilities, and reservation in politics, education, and employment—gradually produced social mobility and a new, aware middle class. This class embraced Ambedkar's ideas. His influence, once thought confined to Dalit-Bahujan communities in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, broadened with the rise of backward-class politics in North India and the movements led by Kanshi Ram.²⁵

²⁴ Ambedkar formally converted to Buddhism at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur, on 14 October 1956, together with several hundred thousand followers. He died shortly afterwards on 6 December 1956.

²⁵ Kanshi Ram (1934–2006) founded the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984, mobilising Dalit and backward-class political assertion in North India.

Ambedkar's greatness, the source material rightly stresses, stems not from power, caste, or lineage, but from the millions whose lives improved because of his struggles. Today his birth anniversary on 14 April is celebrated across India and abroad with an enthusiasm perhaps unmatched by that of any other leader.

10. Political Vision: Representation and National Unity

10.1 The Poona Pact and the Question of Representation

To empower the oppressed, Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for Dalits at the Round Table Conference. Mahatma Gandhi opposed the demand and undertook a fast unto death at Yerwada Jail, placing immense moral pressure on Ambedkar. Faced with the dilemma of saving Gandhi's life or securing distinct political rights, Ambedkar agreed to the Poona Pact, which substituted reserved seats within the general electorate for separate electorates.²⁶ It remains a matter of concern that the promise of fair representation has not been fully realised, with participation still limited in higher education, the judiciary, medicine, engineering, and top administrative posts.

10.2 Partition and the Costs of Division

Deeply concerned about national unity, Ambedkar opposed the partition of India on religious lines and set out his reasoning in *Thoughts on Pakistan*.²⁷ His analysis warned that partition would bring lasting difficulty rather than durable peace, since dividing populations would not resolve the deeper communal questions. Subsequent India–Pakistan relations, marked by recurring conflict and heavy defence expenditure, illustrate the burdens he anticipated.

11. Beyond Symbolism: Caste, Modernity, and Unfinished Work

To honour Ambedkar only through statues and celebrations, while ignoring caste discrimination, untouchability, and caste-based violence, is to do an injustice both to him and to the communities for whose upliftment he lived. Caste remains a hard reality of Indian social and political life, where status and respect are too often determined by birth rather than talent or achievement. Ambedkar analysed these inequalities deeply and proposed concrete

²⁶ The Poona Pact was signed on 24 September 1932, following the Communal Award of 1932 and Gandhi's fast at Yerwada Central Jail, Pune.

²⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Pakistan* (Bombay: Thacker & Co., 1941); revised as *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1945).

solutions to eliminate them.²⁸

He was, at the same time, a firm supporter of modernity, believing that industrial development, democratic institutions, and republican values could create the structures for broad social and economic transformation. The record since economic liberalisation is mixed. A small, educated, urban middle class among marginalised communities has improved its condition and gained a stronger political voice, but large sections—especially those dependent on traditional occupations such as handicrafts, weaving, and artisanal work—remain excluded from the benefits of growth. The persistence of this gap measures how much of Ambedkar's project is still unfinished.

12. Conclusion: An Eternal Ideology

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was not merely a great leader but a timeless ideology. He laid the foundation for an India based on justice, dignity, and equality, and his threefold path that is to Educate, Organise and Agitate.²⁹ His life itself is his message, a story of struggle, determination, and transformation through knowledge.

The theoretical basis of India's progress is rooted in his thoughts. His Constitution, his doctrine of equality, and his ethics based on Buddhism made India an independent nation not only politically but socially and intellectually as well. But his own standard of success lay in practice rather than in mere pronouncement. The nation created upon the principle of equality and constitutionalism would not only be an economic power but also a socially just and morally powerful one. In true homage to Ambedkar, therefore, it is necessary not only to celebrate but also to think about his thoughts, pursuing his task of creating an order in which democracy is not only a form of government but a mode of living based on equality and mutual respect.

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²⁸ See B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), an undelivered address arguing that caste cannot be reformed but must be abolished by rejecting the religious sanction behind it.

²⁹ "Educate, Agitate, Organise" was the motto Ambedkar gave the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, founded in 1924.

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