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## Ambedkar's Ideas on Caste and Equality

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### Abstract:

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the most influential Indian social reformers, critiqued the caste system and advocated for a society based on equality and justice. His relentless fight against caste-based discrimination, particularly for Dalits, remains central to understanding India's social and political reforms. This article explores Ambedkar's critique of caste, his vision of social equality, and his contributions to the drafting of the Indian Constitution. Through an analysis of his works and legacy, the article underscores his transformative vision for a casteless society. A literature survey reviews significant academic perspectives on Ambedkar's impact and relevance in contemporary caste discourses.*

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, Caste System, Social Equality, Dalits, Indian Constitution.

### Introduction

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's critique of the caste system and his vision for equality form a critical part of India's socio-political discourse. As an architect of the Indian Constitution, his contributions go beyond legal reforms; they encompass a radical rethinking of India's social structure, aimed at eliminating caste-based discrimination. This article examines Ambedkar's key ideas on caste and equality, including his advocacy for social justice, his proposals for affirmative action, and his lasting legacy in promoting equality.

Several scholars have extensively analyzed Ambedkar's critique of caste, with Annihilation of Caste being the most significant text on this subject (Ambedkar, 1936). Jaffrelot (2005) notes that Ambedkar viewed caste as a system that perpetuates inequality, arguing that its religious justification made it one of the most oppressive social structures in history. Zelliott (2004) similarly emphasizes how Ambedkar's intellectual approach to the caste problem was based on both empirical observation and historical analysis.

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Ambedkar's role as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution has been discussed in various academic works. Rodrigues (2002) points out that Ambedkar's advocacy for affirmative action and legal safeguards for marginalized communities was unprecedented. While Srinivasan (2010) underscores the importance of Ambedkar's contributions in shaping India's democracy, noting that his ideas on reservations and equality were rooted in his profound understanding of justice and the need for systemic change.

Recent scholarship has examined the relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in contemporary India. Thorat and Newman (2010) highlight that despite legal provisions, caste-based discrimination remains pervasive, particularly in rural areas. Their studies also show how Ambedkar's ideas continue to inspire social movements for Dalit empowerment. Omvedt (2004) explores how Ambedkar's emphasis on education and political participation among the Dalits has continued to shape Dalit politics in modern India.

#### **Ambedkar's Critique of the Caste System**

Ambedkar's most notable work, *Annihilation of Caste*, provides a comprehensive critique of the caste system. Ambedkar argued that the caste system is not just a social hierarchy but a deeply entrenched institution designed to subjugate certain sections of society. He described caste as an unnatural system

that assigns individuals a fixed place in society based solely on birth. His criticism targeted both the upper-caste Hindus who perpetuated the system and the religious justifications that enabled it.

#### **Ambedkar on Social Equality and Justice**

For Ambedkar, social equality was non-negotiable. His understanding of justice was not limited to political or economic spheres but was deeply rooted in the social domain. Ambedkar believed that without dismantling the caste system, no real progress could be made toward achieving social justice. His demand for reservations in education, employment, and political representation for the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) was part of his broader vision of ensuring equal access and opportunities for all.

#### **Ambedkar's Vision for a Casteless Society**

Ambedkar envisioned a society free from the constraints of caste. His decision to convert to Buddhism in 1956 was a rejection of Hinduism's sanctioning of caste-based divisions. Ambedkar believed that religion should be a force for equality, not division. By embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar sought to offer an alternative that promoted values of equality and fraternity.

#### **Ambedkar's Legacy and Modern Relevance**

Today, Ambedkar's legacy is more relevant than ever. The persistence of caste-based discrimination, despite constitutional safeguards, reflects the challenges in realizing Ambedkar's vision. Contemporary scholars like Thorat

and Newman (2010) argue that while India has made significant strides in economic and political reforms, the social sphere, particularly in rural India, continues to be governed by caste hierarchies. Social movements inspired by Ambedkar's ideas continue to advocate for equality, education, and political representation for marginalized communities.

### Conclusion

Dr. Ambedkar's ideas on caste and equality remain foundational to understanding India's struggle for social justice. His critique of the caste system, his advocacy for affirmative action, and his vision for a casteless society continue to inspire movements for equality and justice. While Ambedkar's contributions to the Indian Constitution were groundbreaking, the realization of his vision remains a work in progress, as caste-based inequalities persist in various forms.

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