



# DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND HIS WORKS: EDUCATION, LAW, LABOUR, AND THE ETHICS OF EQUALITY

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**Abstract:** Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956)—jurist, economist, social philosopher, and principal architect of the Indian Constitution—developed a programmatic vision of democracy grounded in social justice, dignity, and human development. This paper synthesizes Ambedkar’s thematic contributions across five interlocking domains: (1) education as emancipation, (2) the legal abolition of caste and rights-based constitutionalism, (3) democratic representation and political safeguards, (4) labour and social-security reforms, and (5) religious-ethical reconstruction through Navayāna Buddhism. Using historical sources and official statistics, we trace outcomes such as literacy growth among Scheduled Castes (SCs), rising participation in higher education, and institutionalization of social protection. We argue that Ambedkar’s thought is best understood as an integrated ethics of equality, in which political democracy must be underwritten by social and economic democracy.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, caste, Constitution of India, social justice, labour law, education, Navayāna Buddhism, Hindu Code Bill.

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## INTRODUCTION

Any serious account of modern Indian democracy begins with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s dual insistence on **constitutional morality** and **social transformation**. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he introduced the Draft Constitution to the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948, outlining a framework that linked civil-political rights to social safeguards for historically oppressed communities (Constitution of India, 1948/2019). Ambedkar argued that without the annihilation of caste, political democracy would remain hollow (Ambedkar, 2014).

### Theme I: Education as Emancipation

Ambedkar consistently argued that education was the key to emancipation, famously asserting that “cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence” (Ambedkar, 2014).

Table 1: Literacy of Scheduled Castes (Selected Years)

Census Year	SC Literacy Rate (%)	Notes
1951	~10	Early post-independence
1981	~21	Gradual expansion
2011	66.1	Major improvements

Source: *Census of India (2011)*

Participation in higher education has also risen. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for SC students increased from 18.9% in 2014–15 to 25.9% in 2021–22, with female SC GER at 26.0% (Ministry of Education, 2024a, 2024b).

### Theme II: Law, Rights, and the Annihilation of Caste

Ambedkar’s legal strategy focused on embedding justice in enforceable rights. The Constitution abolished untouchability (Article 17) and included equality clauses (Articles 14–16) to counter caste-based discrimination (Constitution of India, 1949/2019).

The Poona Pact of 1932, signed after intense negotiations, secured reserved seats for the depressed classes in provincial legislatures under a joint electorate (Constitution of India, 1932/2019). While it increased representation, Ambedkar later reflected that separate electorates would have ensured more independent Dalit voices (Jaffrelot, 2005).

### Theme III: Democratic Representation and Political Safeguards

Ambedkar designed political safeguards to ensure representation for SCs and STs in legislatures. Today, 84 seats in the Lok Sabha are reserved for SCs (Election Commission of India, 2020).



**Table 2: SC Political Inclusion Indicators**

Indicator	Early Post-Independence	Contemporary
SC population share	14.4% (1951)	16.6% (2011)
Lok Sabha reserved seats	Introduced 1952	84 seats
Constitutional basis	Articles 330–334	Extended via amendments

**Theme IV: Labour and Social Security**

Ambedkar, as Labour Member of the Viceroy’s Council (1942–46), pioneered reforms such as the eight-hour workday and the Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) Act of 1948, India’s first comprehensive social-insurance law (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2018).

**Table 3: Ambedkar’s Labour Reforms**

Year	Reform	Impact
1946	Factories Act amendment	Eight-hour workday
1948	ESI Act	Social insurance for workers

**Theme V: Gender Justice and the Hindu Code Bill**

Ambedkar’s Hindu Code Bill sought to codify Hindu law, granting women equal property and inheritance rights. When it failed to pass in 1951, he resigned from the Cabinet (Ambedkar, 2014; Keer, 2019). The reforms were eventually enacted in piecemeal through the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Hindu Succession Act (1956), and related laws.

**Theme VI: Navayāna Buddhism**

In 1956, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism and initiated mass conversions. The Buddhist population in India rose from 0.18 million in 1951 to 8.44 million in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). Ambedkar’s Navayāna interpreted Buddhism as a social-ethical path of equality and justice (Zelliot, 2004).

**CONCLUSION**

Ambedkar’s works spanned education, law, representation, labour, gender, and religion, unified under the principle of human dignity. Statistical data confirm progress in SC literacy, higher education, and representation, though gaps remain. Ambedkar’s vision of combining **political democracy** with **social and economic democracy** remains relevant to India’s ongoing struggles with inequality.

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