



A STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR AND THEIR RELEVANCE IN THE 21st CENTURY

Mandeep Kaur

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, 171005

Dr. Kanika Handa

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, 171005

Paper Received On: 20 MAR 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 24 APRIL 2026

Published On: 01 MAY 2026

Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, recognized as a visionary leader and principal architect of the Indian Constitution, argued that education is fundamental to social transformation and empowerment. He contended that education is crucial for eliminating caste-based discrimination and social inequality. This study analyzed Ambedkar's educational philosophy and its relevance in the 21st century. Using a historical-philosophical method and qualitative research approach, the analysis centres on his perspectives regarding the education of women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes. The research draws on secondary sources, including books, research articles, and policy documents. The findings demonstrated that Ambedkar's educational principles remain highly relevant to addressing current challenges, including educational inequality among women, social exclusion, gender disparities, and the pursuit of inclusive and equitable education. His philosophy positioned education at the heart of social reform and human empowerment. Incorporating Ambedkar's educational vision into present-day educational policies and practices could significantly advance the development of a just, inclusive, and democratic society in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Educational Philosophy, Women's Education, Education of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe, 21st Century.*

Introduction

“The education that makes us neither competent nor teaches us lessons of equality and morality is no more education.”

-Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Copyright © 2026, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, widely recognized as Babasaheb Ambedkar and honored with the Bharat Ratna, was a distinguished political leader, jurist, philosopher, anthropologist, historian, writer, economist, scholar, social activist, and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar regarded education as a transformative tool capable of effecting significant changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres of individual and collective life. As Ambedkar stated, "Education is a weapon of creation of mental and educational development, a weapon of eradication of social slavery of economic development of political freedom." His philosophy positioned education at the heart of social reform and human empowerment.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh, to a Mahar family. He was the youngest of fourteen children of Ramji Maloji Sakpal, a Subedar Major in the British Indian Army, and Bhimabai. Ambedkar began his education at age five in Dapoli and later continued his studies in Satara. Despite persistent caste discrimination, including being denied access to Sanskrit education, he demonstrated exceptional academic performance. In 1907, he became the first student from the untouchable community to pass the matriculation examination. In 1908, he enrolled at Elphinstone College in Bombay on a scholarship and completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1912. In January 1913, Ambedkar commenced work as a lieutenant in the army of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, where he again encountered caste-based discrimination and received support primarily from Pandit Atma Ram and members of the Arya Samaj. Subsequently, the Maharaja selected Ambedkar for higher studies in America, awarding him a three-year scholarship to Columbia University in exchange for ten years of service. Ambedkar thus became the first member of the untouchable community to study abroad. His educational journey in abroad was unprecedented for someone born into the untouchable caste.

Ambedkar at Columbia University

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar pursued studies in Economics, Sociology, History, Anthropology, Moral Philosophy, and Political Science at Columbia University, where he earned an M.A. in Economics in 1915 with the thesis titled "*Ancient Indian Commerce.*" He subsequently submitted his PhD thesis, "*National Dividend for India: A Historic and Analytical Study.*" In 1916, Ambedkar enrolled at the London School of Economics and Political Science and Gray's Inn to study law. After returning to India in 1917, he taught at Sydenham College before resuming his studies in London in 1920.

Dr. Ambedkar and Mook Nayak

On January 31, 1920, Dr. Ambedkar launched a weekly newspaper titled Mook Nayak, which translates to 'Leader of the Silent.' The publication sought to provide Dalits, economically disadvantaged groups, and other marginalized communities with a platform to present their concerns to the government and the public. It functioned as a medium for advocating their rights and social advancement.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar at the London School of Economics

In 1920, Dr. Ambedkar returned to London to pursue further studies in Economics and Law. He obtained an MSc in 1921 from the London School of Economics and Political Science, completed a thesis, 'Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India.' In 1922, he submitted his dissertation, 'The Problem of the Rupee: its origin and its solution,' for his DSc, which significantly deepened his understanding of India's economic and financial challenges.

Sr. No.	Degree	Year	University
1	Elementary	1902	Satara School, MH.
2	Matriculation	1907	Elphinstone High School.
3	Inter (English)	1909	Elphinstone College Bombay &
4	B.A. (Eco, pol, sc)	1913	University of Bombay.
5	M.A. (Eco-Soc History-Anthro-Poli)	1915	Columbia University, New York
6	PhD	1917	Columbia University.
7	M.Sc.	June 1921	London School of Economics
8	Bar-at-Law	30/9/ 1920	Gray's Inn, London
(1922-1923 spent some time in reading economics in the University of Bonn in Germany)			
9	D.Sc	Nov 1923	London School of Economics
10	L.L.D.	5/6 1952	Columbia University
11	D.Litt.	22/1 1953	Osmania University, Hyderabad, India
12	No.1 Scholar In World	13/9 2015	Columbia University, New York.

Dr. Ambedkar utilized this education as a powerful tool to challenge social injustice, draft the Indian Constitution, and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities. His academic credentials gave him the intellectual authority to lead India's social transformation.

Women Education

Dr. Ambedkar was a prominent advocate for economic and social justice for women, emphasized the central role of education in their empowerment and societal advancement. He asserted that educated women contribute significantly to the upliftment of both families and society. Ambedkar criticized the Manusmriti for perpetuating the oppression of women and called for equal access to education and opportunities. He encouraged women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to resist practices such as child marriage and the devdasi system. Through the 'Hindu Code Bill', Ambedkar initiated reforms in laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance, thereby promoting equality and dignity for women.

Education of Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are historically marginalized communities in India, constituting 16.6% and 8.6% of the population, respectively. SCs have experienced persistent social and educational discrimination, while STs, as indigenous groups, have often lived in isolation with limited access to resources. Previously referred to as "Untouchables" and "Tribals," these groups were denied basic rights and remained socially and economically disadvantaged for centuries. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar identified education as essential for their liberation and empowerment. He advocated for their rights and social upliftment. Through newspapers such as *Mooknayak*, *Bahiskrit Bharat*, and *Enlightened India*, as well as by establishing the Scheduled Castes Federation, Ambedkar sought to raise awareness and promote equality, asserting that lack of education was the primary cause of their persistent poverty.

Significance of the Study

Most research so far has focused on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's general philosophy, his views on religion, or comparative studies. There has been little work on his ideas about education for the depressed classes and women's social emancipation. Because of this gap, it is important to examine his educational views on women and the depressed class, and to consider how relevant they are today for our country's social, economic, and political progress. Thus, the researcher selected the present study.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in relation to the education of women.
- To study the thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in relation to the education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- To examine the relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's educational thoughts in the 21st

century.

Delimitation of the Study

The present study is confined to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts in relation to education and the upliftment of women, education and the social status of Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes, and the relevance of his thoughts in the 21st century. The study is further confined to historical facts.

Review of the related literature

Kheer (1994) examined Dr. Ambedkar's contributions in his book *Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission*. The book provides a comprehensive account of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's life and his struggles from birth to death. Kheer emphasized that Ambedkar's primary mission was to liberate and educate untouchables by establishing inclusive, low-cost institutions to provide quality education for all.

Anand (2014) analyzed the Relevance of concept of school B.R. Ambedkar in Present System of Education. He founded the idea that Dr. Ambedkar advocated for equal educational opportunities through constitutional provisions and policy measures. He emphasized the eradication of untouchability to enable marginalized groups to lead dignified lives. The research employed a descriptive, literature-based analytical approach.

Sahadevudu, Babu, Reddy, and Venkateswarulu (2015) in their study *The Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Modern India: A Study*, argued that despite Dr. Ambedkar's multifaceted contributions as a scholar, social reformer, emancipator of Dalits, nation-builder, and principal architect of the Indian constitution, he has often been portrayed solely as a critic of Hinduism, both historically and in contemporary discourse.

Sharma (2015) in her study *Ambedkar's struggle for Empowerment of Downtrodden*, observed that Dr Ambedkar dedicated his life to uplifting the downtrodden, and viewed the lack of education as the root of their oppression. She also highlighted that Ambedkar consistently struggled to reconstruct a casteless society.

Kumar (2019), in his study *Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Idea on Education: A Quest for Social Justice in India*, observed that Dr Ambedkar dedicated his life to empowering Dalits and other marginalized groups through education and the pursuit of social justice. Kumar further emphasized that Ambedkar's educational initiatives for Dalits and marginalized communities continue to exert significant influence in the contemporary era.

Das (2019), in his book *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: A Visionary of India*, detailed Dr. Ambedkar's efforts to overcome educational barriers and his advocacy for the education of

Copyright © 2026, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

marginalized communities. Das also examined the various movements led by Dr. Ambedkar to raise awareness of civil rights. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar secured legal protections for untouchables and women, and promoted the principles of “educate, organize, agitate” through knowledge dissemination, political organization, and social activism.

Method and Procedure

The present problem- A study of the educational thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and their relevance in the 21st century is necessarily a philosophical one. The study is philosophical in the sense that ideals of the eminent educationalist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are organized, critically analysed and evaluated. It is historical because historical facts, events, and work done by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar regarding women’s education, and the education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Accordingly, a historical-philosophical method is employed.

Tool Used

Content analysis was used both as a tool and a technique to analyse the educational thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Collection of Data

Data for this study were collected from secondary sources. Literature authored by various scholars who have examined and interpreted the life and contributions of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar served as the secondary sources. The study was conducted with a comprehensive approach, utilizing materials from multiple authors who have published works on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Analysis and Interpretation

Objective–I: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s Thoughts on Women’s Education

Dr. Ambedkar believed education was central to women’s empowerment and societal progress. Historically, deeply rooted religious and social traditions systematically denied Indian women access to education, legal rights, and participation in public life, restricting them to domestic roles. The Hindu Shastras portrayed women as equivalent to animals or objects of enjoyment. This perspective is further reflected in the verses of the Ramayana by Tulsidas: ‘*Dhor, Ghanwar, Shudra aur Naari - Ye sab tadan ke adhikari*’.

Ambedkar consistently criticized and challenged oppressive social structures, arguing that the advancement of women required the dismantling of caste-based and patriarchal domination. As a leading advocate for social reform, he used his journals *Mook Nayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat* to draw attention to issues such as women’s exploitation, illiteracy, and a lack of autonomy. His efforts extended beyond theoretical advocacy to practical initiatives. The

formation of the Women's Association in 1928, under the leadership of Ramabai Ambedkar, mobilized women and encouraged their participation in public life. The participation of nearly 500 women in the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha in 1930 illustrated Ambedkar's effectiveness in fostering awareness and solidarity among women. In his address at the *All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference* on 20 July 1942 in Nagpur, he stated, "I measure the progress of the community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." He advocated for women's health, hygiene, family planning, and self-reliance before these became national priorities. Ambedkar's support for the Maternity Benefit Bill (1942) demonstrated his commitment to protecting women in the workforce. The Bill sought to provide paid maternity leave, job security, and healthcare for pregnant women, rights that later influenced the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961. His most significant legislative contribution was the drafting of the Hindu Code Bill in 1949, which aimed to reform Hindu personal laws and grant women equal rights in property, divorce, adoption, and maintenance.



Ambedkar's role as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution further ensured constitutional protections for women. Articles related to equality, non-discrimination, equal opportunity, maternity relief, equal pay, and women's political participation reflect his vision of justice and empowerment. His legacy influences many modern laws, such as the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995), and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Protection and Redressal) Act, 2013. Government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Working Women Hostel Scheme, Scheme

Copyright © 2026, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

of Strengthening Education among Scheduled Tribes (STs) Girls in low Literacy Districts, KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya), and scholarships for girls also reflect his enduring vision for inclusive female education. In essence, Ambedkar viewed women's education not merely as literacy, but as liberation—social, economic, political, and intellectual.

Objectives-2: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts on the Schedule Caste and the Schedule Tribe

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar dedicated his efforts to advancing the educational opportunities of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, asserting that education was fundamental to their dignity and liberation. Through publications such as *Mook Nayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, he advocated for social reform. He established organizations including the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (1924) and the Depressed Classes Education Society (1928), to create hostels, libraries, and vocational training programs aimed at improving the economic conditions of marginalized communities.



In 1924, Ambedkar established the Excluded Benefactors Association to promote the welfare of the depressed classes. The following year, he initiated a hostel through this organization to provide shelter and educational support for Dalit students. During the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, he advocated for scholarships, compulsory education, and government employment for marginalized groups. On June 14, 1928, Ambedkar founded the *Dalit Educational Institution* to support secondary education for Dalits. On August 15, 1936, he formed the Independent Labor Party to protect the interests of the depressed classes. In July 1945, he established the People's Education Society to further the education of Dalit students. Ambedkar ensured that the Constitution included comprehensive provisions for safeguarding human rights, offering hope for ending the centuries-long oppression of the so-called untouchables in India.

After Independence, the Government of India has taken a number of steps to strengthen the educational base of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Some major initiatives are:

- The National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1992) included special measures for SCs and STs by abolishing tuition fees and offering incentives like free textbooks, uniforms, stationery, and school bags.
- The 86th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2002, made free and compulsory elementary education a fundamental right under Article 21-A for all children aged 6 to 14 years.
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) aimed to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) and to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14.
- 15 per cent seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, and 7.5 per cent seats are reserved for Scheduled Tribes, respectively, in KVs and no tuition fee up to class XII.
- Reservation of seats in favour of children belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in NVs. 22.5 per cent (15 per cent for Scheduled Castes and 7.50 per cent for Scheduled Tribes) and a maximum of 50 per cent for both the categories (SCs and STs) taken together.
- In 1992, Dr. Ambedkar National Scholarship Scheme for meritorious students was implemented by Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with a view to recognising, promoting and assisting meritorious students belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for enabling them to pursue higher studies.

Objective- III: To examine the relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's educational thoughts in the 21st century.

Dr. Ambedkar was a distinguished intellectual and social reformer whose primary objective was to raise the consciousness of Hindu society to foster greater empathy toward the untouchables. He was regarded as 'Deenabandhu', meaning friend of the helpless. According to Dr. Ambedkar "Knowledge is just like the flow of the Ganges, it purifies old sins, removes untouchability and human poverty". Through his persistent efforts and following the adoption of the Constitution of India, individuals from untouchable communities began to secure positions in government sectors such as civil administration, police, judiciary, army, navy, and air force. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar championed education for the masses and initiated an educational

movement aimed at creating awareness and promoting the liberation of marginalized groups. His ideas established a transformative framework that continues to inspire movements for women's rights in India.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's educational thoughts remain highly relevant in the 21st century due to their emphasis on access, equity, and empowerment. Here are several initiatives of his educational philosophy and their relevance today:

Access to Education: Ambedkar advocated for inclusive education and policies like free schooling, Scholarships to marginalised students, Mid-Day Meal Scheme serves over 120 million children daily, addressing both nutrition and attendance, and reservations policies in Kendriya Vidyalaya's and Navodaya Vidyalaya's ensure representation of SC/ST communities.

Quality Education: Modern education emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills development aligned with Ambedkar's vision of competence-building education. He also highlighted the need to improve rural infrastructure and ensure empowerment through flexible learning methods, which are vital for success in a rapidly changing world. Online platforms like SWAYAM, DIKSHA, and e-Pathshala are breaking geographical barriers. Digital education democratises access to knowledge, enabling students in remote areas to learn from high-quality resources that were previously unavailable to them.

Inclusive Education: Free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years under the Right to Education Act ensures universal access. This approach aims to provide access for learners with disabilities, girls, economically weaker sections, and marginalized communities through specialised efforts and provisions. Rural infrastructure improvements include smart classrooms, digital connectivity, and accessible facilities for learners with disabilities. Flexible learning methods- online courses, multilingual content, and adaptive technologies- accommodate diverse needs, ensuring no learner is left behind regardless of location or ability.

Empowerment of Women: Women constitute half of India's population and are increasingly key decision-makers in families and society. Education expands career opportunities, professional growth, and lifestyle choices for women. Government Initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, CBSE Udaan Scheme, and National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education actively support girls' education and empowerment, reflecting Ambedkar's vision of women's liberation through knowledge.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: The National Education Policy 2020 embodies principles that Dr. Ambedkar Championed throughout his life. NEP 2020's core pillars of

equity, inclusion, and social justice directly reflect Ambedkar's vision of education as a liberating force. The policy emphasizes universal access to quality education, lifelong learning opportunities, and special support for marginalized communities—all echoing Ambedkar's advocacy for educational empowerment of the oppressed.

These initiatives reflected Ambedkar's belief that education must be accessible to all, regardless of social or economic background, transforming his vision into tangible progress.

Conclusion

Ambedkar's advocacy remains vital in addressing persistent educational inequalities in the 21st century. Education in the 21st century has become more accessible due to technological progress, inclusive educational policies, and increased opportunities for marginalized groups. Digital learning platforms, open and distance education, scholarships, and government welfare schemes have lowered barriers related to caste, gender, economic status, and location. As India strives for universal quality education, its principles of social justice, inclusion, and empowerment through knowledge serve as guiding lights for policymakers, educators, and reformers committed to building an equitable society. His teachings remind us that true education must cultivate equality, morality, and competence. Dr. Ambedkar's educational philosophy established education as a fundamental right and the most powerful instrument for social emancipation. His vision of education as a weapon against social slavery continues to guide policies aimed at uplifting marginalized communities. The constitutional safeguards he championed remain the foundation of inclusive education in India today. From the Right to Education Act to NEP 2020, modern educational policies echo Ambedkar's vision for equitable, accessible education. His advocacy for women's education and SC/ST empowerment has manifested in scholarships, reservations, and infrastructure development that continue to transform lives and communities across the nation. The modern emphasis on inclusive education, lifelong learning, and equal opportunities underscores the ongoing importance of his vision in addressing educational inequalities and advancing social justice in the 21st century.

References

- Banu, A. (2019). *Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in women empowerment. New Horizons of Dalit Culture and Literature*, 10(2), 21-23.
- Das, P.C. (2019). *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar a visionary of India. Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd.*
- Datta, R. (2019). *Emancipating and strengthening Indian women: an analysis of B.R. Ambedkar's contribution. Sage Journal*, 11(1), 25-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X18819901>
- Diwakar, D. (2021, August 21). *Ambedkar's quest for gender equality. The Womb Blog.*

- <https://www.thewomb.in/ambedkars-quest-for-gender-equality/>
- Keer, D. (1994). *Dr B.R. Ambedkar life and mission*. Ramdas Bhatkal for Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.
- Kumar, R. (2018). *Ambedkar and women*. Commonwealth Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Kohli, H.S., & Tadvii, H.J. (2020). *Educational thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*. *National Journal on Social Issues and Problem*, 09(01), 10-13.
https://www.snmorcollege.org.in/research_journal
- Mandal, B.C. (2023, April). *An overview of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas of education and its relevance in the present Indian situation*. *Monthly Bulletin*, 52(4), 13-20.
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bankim-Mandal/publication/369793633>
- Mehandiratt, K. (2020, April 13). *Educational philosophy of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, 14 April birthday special*. *Rashtriya Shiksha*. <https://rashtriyashiksha.com/educational-philosophy-of-dr-bhimrao-ramji-ambedkar-14-april-birthday-special/>
- Press Information Bureau. (2021, December 8). *Measures for gender equality and empowerment of women [Press release]*. <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1779252>
- Sahadevudu, D., Babu, G.R., Reddy, Y.R., & Venkateshwarulu, C. (2015). *The role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in modern India- a study*. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(11), 20-23.
<https://www.isca.me/IJSS/Archive/v4/i11/4.ISCA-IRJSS-2015-253.pdf>
- Solkhe, M. (2018). *Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar towards women empowerment in India: an assessment*. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Research in Allied Education*, 15(5), 520-527.
- Parshad, G., & Narwal, M. (2019). *Revisiting Bhimrao Ambedkar a story of social and political justice*. Sanjay Prakashan.
- Zaidi, K.M. (2019). *Education for social emancipation: in agreement with Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar*. *Journal of Advanced Research in Science and Social Science*, 02(01), 80-86.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>