



Novel Insights, *An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*
A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal
ISSN: 3048-6572 (Online) ISSN: 3049-1991 (Print)
Volume-I, Issue-III, February 2025, Page No.171-181
Published by Uttarsuri, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>
DOI: 10.69655/novelinsight.vol.1.issue.03W.018



Dr. Ambedkar and the Notion of Society, State, and Governance

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Received: 10.01.2025; Accepted: 25.02.2025; Available online: 28.02.2025

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Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the foremost architects of modern India and a champion of social justice, presented a profound vision of society, state, and governance that remains relevant today. His ideas were deeply rooted in the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, which he sought to institutionalize in India through a robust democratic framework. For Dr. Ambedkar, the interplay between society, state, government, and administration was not merely theoretical but a practical necessity to ensure justice, equality, and human dignity. This elaboration delves into his vision in greater detail, shedding light on his comprehensive approach to creating an equitable and inclusive social order.

Keywords: Constitution, Democracy, State, Discrimination, Public policy.

Introduction: The vision of society of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was deeply influenced by his personal experiences with caste-based discrimination and his unwavering commitment to social justice. His understanding of the caste system as the primary barrier to equality shaped his approach to governance, law, and public policy. Ambedkar saw the state as an active force in dismantling oppressive structures and ensuring justice for all. He believed that true equality could only be achieved through strong institutional frameworks that guaranteed education, employment, and economic opportunities for marginalized groups. His role in drafting the Indian Constitution reflected this belief, as he worked to embed principles of justice, liberty, and equality into the legal foundation of the nation. For Ambedkar, the duty of state extended beyond governance; it had to be a proactive agent of change, challenging societal norms that perpetuated discrimination. His advocacy for affirmative action, reservation policies, and social welfare programs was rooted in his conviction that the government must take concrete steps to correct historical injustices. Ultimately, his vision was of a society where dignity and human rights were not dictated by birth but by individual merit and capability. His legacy continues to shape discussions on caste, equality, and the role of the state in India today.

The vision of Dr. Ambedkar for the role of state in society was revolutionary. He believed that the primary responsibility of the state was to eliminate social evils such as caste-based discrimination, untouchability, and economic exploitation. In his view, the state was not just a passive entity, but an active agent of social transformation.

Ambedkar argued that the state must dismantle oppressive structures and establish a social system that guaranteed equal opportunities for all. He believed that this could only be achieved through a democratic setup that upheld individual freedom and collective progress. For him, democracy was not just a political system, but a way of life that valued equality, justice, and freedom. His emphasis on the role of state in promoting social justice was influenced by his experiences with the Indian Constitution. As the chief architect of the Constitution, Ambedkar ensured that it enshrined the principles of equality, justice, and liberty. He believed that the Constitution provided a framework for the state to promote social welfare and address the historical injustices faced by marginalized communities. Some key aspects of the framework of Dr. Ambedkar for the role of state in society include:

- a) **Dismantling Oppressive Structures:** Ambedkar believed that the state must dismantle oppressive structures such as the caste system, which perpetuated inequality and discrimination.
- b) **Establishing a Social System:** He argued that the state must establish a social system that guaranteed equal opportunities for all, regardless of their caste, creed, or gender.
- c) **Promoting Individual Freedom and Collective Progress:** Ambedkar believed that the state must promote individual freedom and collective progress through a democratic setup that upheld the principles of equality, justice, and liberty.
- d) **Addressing Historical Injustices:** He believed that the state must address the historical injustices faced by marginalized communities through affirmative action and other measures.

The notion of democracy, as per Dr. Ambedkar, extended beyond political institutions to encompass social and economic equality. He saw democracy as a way of life that required an inclusive and just society, where every individual, regardless of caste, class, or gender, had the opportunity to thrive. His democratic ideals were rooted in the belief that political freedom alone was insufficient unless accompanied by social and economic justice. Ambedkar championed a parliamentary system of governance that protected individual freedoms while ensuring collective welfare. He identified freedom of expression, the right to choose profession, and the right to own property as fundamental rights that the state must safeguard. However, he maintained that these freedoms should not lead to unchecked inequality; instead, they had to be regulated to serve the broader interests of justice and social equity. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar played a crucial role in embedding democratic principles within legal framework. He was instrumental in ensuring constitutional safeguards for marginalized communities, including provisions for affirmative action, political representation, and social welfare. His advocacy for universal adult franchise was a testament to his commitment to equal political participation for all citizens.

The model of governance in the vision of Dr. Ambedkar placed a significant emphasis on the role of the state in economic and social development. He argued that the state must actively intervene to address economic disparities and ensure the just distribution of wealth. He made a crucial distinction between the laws of production and the laws of distribution. While production followed natural laws, distribution was governed by societal norms and rules. He believed that the state had a critical role in reshaping these norms to promote social justice.

Dr. Ambedkar proposed state socialism as a means to achieve economic equality. He envisioned a system where the state controlled key industries and resources to prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. At the same time, he supported individual enterprise and private property, provided they did not lead to exploitation or inequality. He argued for a balanced approach where the intervention of state ensured social justice while preserving individual freedoms.

Dr. Ambedkar viewed education as the cornerstone of empowerment and social transformation. He firmly believed that education was not only a means of individual progress but also a powerful tool to challenge entrenched social hierarchies and discrimination. For Ambedkar, education was essential in breaking the cycle of oppression that kept marginalized communities, especially Dalits, in a state of social and economic subjugation. He advocated for the active role of state in providing free and compulsory education to all, ensuring that disadvantaged groups had equal access to quality learning opportunities. Ambedkar saw education as a means to foster critical thinking, self-respect, and awareness of rights. He believed that an educated society would be better equipped to challenge inequality and work towards social justice. His emphasis on education was reflected in his own life, as he overcame significant obstacles to attain higher education, eventually earning multiple degrees from prestigious institutions. His personal journey underscored his belief that knowledge and learning were the most effective tools in the fight against caste-based oppression.

To institutionalize this vision, he supported policies such as scholarships, reservations in educational institutions, and special initiatives to uplift marginalized students. His contributions continue to shape education policies, reinforcing the idea that true democracy and equality can only be achieved through an educated and empowered citizenry.

Inequality, in his view, was the root cause of social stagnation and conflict. He believed that a society riddled with inequality could never achieve true democracy. To address this, he proposed several measures aimed at reducing disparities and promoting social justice. One of his key ideas was the amendment of traditional inheritance laws to ensure a fair distribution of wealth. He argued that unchecked inheritance led to the concentration of wealth and power, which in turn perpetuated inequality. By reforming inheritance laws, he sought to create a level playing field where everyone had an equal opportunity to succeed.

Dr. Ambedkar also emphasized the importance of affirmative action in addressing historical injustices. He advocated for reservations in education, employment, and political

representation for Dalits and other marginalized groups. He believed that such measures were necessary to provide these communities with the opportunities they had been historically denied. However, he stressed that these measures were not an end in themselves but a means to achieve social equality. Once equality was achieved, he argued, there would be no need for special provisions.

The Interdependence of Society, State, and Administration: The political philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar was grounded in the idea that society, the state, and administration were deeply interwoven and that a just and equitable society could not be achieved without ensuring fairness in governance and administration. He believed that these three elements were not separate entities but rather complementary forces that needed to function harmoniously to promote justice, equality, and democracy. His vision was holistic and he saw the state as a vehicle for social reform, society as the foundation of governance, and administration as the mechanism for implementation. He argued that a just society cannot exist without a just state that actively works to eliminate discrimination and promotes equality. A strong state cannot function without an efficient and inclusive administration that ensures justice is not just promised but delivered. An effective administration cannot exist without a well-educated and diverse workforce that represents all sections of society and understands the realities of the people it serves. Each of these elements was interconnected, and weakness in any one of them would lead to an unjust and inefficient system. For instance, a state that enacts progressive laws but lacks an accountable administration may fail in implementing reforms. Similarly, an administration dominated by upper-caste elites may not be motivated to serve marginalized communities fairly.

Ambedkar saw society as the bedrock upon which the state was built. He argued that a society plagued by inequality and discrimination could never sustain a strong and just state. The historical caste-based discrimination in India, in his view, had created a fragmented society where certain groups were systematically denied rights and opportunities. He believed that the state had a responsibility to intervene and create conditions that fostered equality, social mobility, and dignity for all citizens. For Ambedkar, an ideal society was one based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. He believed that true fraternity among citizens could only exist when every individual was treated with dignity, regardless of caste, religion, or gender. Without a socially inclusive foundation, the state could not function as a democratic entity in its true sense.

Ambedkar rejected the idea of a passive state that merely maintained law and order. Instead, he envisioned the state as an active force that played a transformative role in society. He firmly believed that the state must take responsibility for correcting historical injustices, ensuring equal opportunities, and safeguarding the rights of the oppressed. To achieve this, Ambedkar supported a constitutional democracy that enshrined the principles of justice, equality, and liberty. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, he worked to embed safeguards such as affirmative action, protection of fundamental rights, and legal provisions against discrimination. These constitutional provisions were meant to empower marginalized communities and ensure their representation in all aspects of governance.

Ambedkar also emphasized that for a state to be truly democratic, it had to be inclusive. He advocated for universal adult suffrage, believing that every citizen should have the right to participate in governance, irrespective of caste or social background. His insistence on democratic participation was based on the idea that real democracy was only possible when all sections of society had an equal voice in decision-making.

Ambedkar understood that while laws and policies were crucial, their impact depended on how they were implemented. He saw administration as the bridge between the state and society an essential mechanism through which the principles of justice, equality, and democracy were translated into reality. One of his key arguments was that the administrative system should reflect the diversity of society. He believed that a homogeneous bureaucracy dominated by a privileged few would not be able to understand or address the needs of the broader population. To correct this imbalance, he strongly advocated for the representation of Dalits and other marginalized communities in public administration, law enforcement, and the judiciary. He viewed reservations in government jobs and civil services as essential steps toward making administration more inclusive. His belief was that without representation, policies meant for social justice would remain ineffective or would be implemented in ways that continued to favour dominant castes.

Ambedkar also placed a strong emphasis on the role of education in governance. He argued that an efficient and competent bureaucracy was critical to the success of the state. In his view, a well-educated administrative board would be better equipped to implement laws fairly, manage public resources efficiently, and uphold democratic principles. To this end, he advocated for policies that would ensure access to higher education for marginalized communities, believing that education was the key to breaking the cycle of oppression and enabling full participation in governance. His personal struggles to attain an education, despite caste-based discrimination, reinforced his conviction that knowledge was the greatest tool for empowerment. For Ambedkar, governance was not merely about policy-making; it was about ensuring that policies served the people effectively. He insisted that the administrative machinery must be transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the citizens. He believed that unchecked power in administration could lead to corruption and bias in policy implementation. To prevent this, he advocated for mechanisms that would hold public officials accountable, such as constitutional checks, independent oversight bodies, and citizen participation in governance. He stressed that the government must function for the people and not just for a privileged few.

The ultimate vision of Dr. Ambedkar was to create a classless and casteless society. He believed that social stratification based on caste and class was the greatest obstacle to progress and democracy. He argued that true democracy could only be achieved in a society where individuals were judged by their abilities and contributions rather than their birth. To achieve this, he advocated for a governance system that dismantled feudal structures and promoted social mobility.

He also emphasized the importance of fraternity in creating a cohesive society. He believed that fraternity, or the sense of brotherhood, was essential to overcome divisions and foster unity. For Dr. Ambedkar, fraternity was not just a moral principle but a practical necessity for a democratic society. He argued that without fraternity, the principles of liberty and equality could not be sustained.

Ambedkar championed the eradication of caste discrimination, seeing it as one of the primary hindrances to social and economic progress. In his analysis, caste discrimination in the division of labour not only curtailed individual potential but also impeded broader development in society. He viewed untouchability and the rigid caste hierarchy as moral and structural failings, which replaced a natural and skill-based system of labour division with one based solely on birth. This transformation trapped individuals in predetermined roles, stripping them of the ability to pursue their aspirations and talents.

Ambedkar traced the evolution of the division of labour in ancient Indian society, observing that it was initially fluid and skill-oriented. During its early stages, individuals had the autonomy to choose occupations aligned with their abilities and interests. However, over time, this flexible framework ossified into a rigid caste structure due to feudalistic influences. Knowledge, wealth, and resources became concentrated in the hands of the upper castes-Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas-while Dalits and other lower castes were relegated to menial and often degrading tasks. This unjust system, according to Ambedkar, resulted in the exclusion of lower castes from participating in meaningful economic activities and personal growth. It deprived society of the productive contributions of a significant portion of the population. Such inequity, he argued, stifled creativity, efficiency, and innovation while exacerbating inefficiencies and waste in the system.

Ambedkar was a vocal critic of the moral and economic ramifications of caste system. He questioned the ethics of a structure that reduced millions of individuals to untouchables and deemed so impure that their very sight or shadow was considered polluting. He highlighted how this form of discrimination undermined aspirations for democracy and equality, creating a system where the rights and dignity of entire communities were denied.

From an economic perspective, Ambedkar emphasised that the caste-based division of labour severely restricted ability to thrive. Excluding large sections of society from skilled labour and knowledge-based professions not only curtailed individual potential but also limited ability to compete and grow in a global context. He argued that such exclusion made India vulnerable to external domination and stagnation.

Industrialisation and Urbanisation: Ambedkar believed that mechanisation and industrialisation offered opportunities to challenge the entrenched caste system. The rise of cities and industrial hubs created new economic spaces that were less bound by traditional caste identities. These urban centres allowed Dalits and other marginalised groups to escape the rigid caste-based occupational structures of rural India.

Ambedkar argued that industrial jobs could offer economic independence to Dalits, creating pathways to dignity and self-respect. However, he recognised that access to education, technical training, and opportunities was often monopolised by the upper castes, further marginalising oppressed communities. To address this imbalance, Ambedkar called for systemic reforms, including affirmative action policies such as reservations in education, employment, and politics. These measures, he believed, were essential to ensure that Dalits and other marginalised groups could access the tools necessary for their empowerment.

His vision for social justice and equality centered on the equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their social standing, could access basic necessities and participate in the progress of the nation. His perspective was deeply influenced by his understanding of systemic inequalities rooted in caste and his commitment to eradicating them.

Ambedkar argued that the well-being of a nation depended not on its material wealth but on the happiness and dignity of its people. He was particularly concerned about the majority of population, who struggled with poverty and deprivation. For Ambedkar, a just distribution of wealth was a moral imperative. It was essential to ensure that everyone, especially the marginalized, could lead lives of dignity and enjoy equal opportunities for growth and development.

Recognizing the structural barriers to equality, Ambedkar played a pivotal role in drafting the Indian Constitution, embedding principles of social justice, equality, and human rights. Through the Constitution, he sought to create a framework that would address historical injustices and provide safeguards for marginalized communities. One of his most significant contributions was the introduction of affirmative action policies, including reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in education, government jobs, and politics. These measures aimed to level the playing field and ensure representation and access to opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups.

His economic philosophy focused on increasing human happiness and reducing social inequalities. He believed that improving the consumption level of society was crucial for social upliftment, which could be achieved by ensuring equitable distribution of production benefits.

Ambedkar identified two primary factors contributing to economic inequality: control over the means of production and social inertia. He argued that true economic equality could only be achieved by moving away from outdated systems and embracing mechanized production. The unequal distribution of land and resources exacerbated poverty and inequality, particularly among marginalized groups.

To address economic inequality, Ambedkar advocated for land reforms, where land should be distributed more equitably, especially to the landless and lower castes. He also proposed the establishment of large joint capital companies to counter the effects of monopolistic systems. His economic concepts emphasized the need for reforming outdated

systems that sustained inequality, aiming to create a more just social order and foster both mental and material happiness among people.

Ambedkar emphasized the need for state socialism to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring that the benefits of production were shared broadly among the population. He also stressed that improving social consumption levels required dismantling discriminatory practices based on caste, which hindered economic progress.

His personal experiences with caste-based discrimination shaped his understanding of social injustice and informed his argument that social reform was crucial for economic development. Ambedkar recognized that caste-based inequality and lack of social mobility were significant barriers to raising the overall consumption level in society.

The economic vision of Dr. Ambedkar was profoundly interconnected with his commitment to social justice and his efforts to dismantle entrenched social hierarchies. His work, such as *'Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies'* (1918) and *'The Problem of the Rupee'* (1926), reveals his incisive analysis of economic challenges and his forward-looking strategies to achieve equality and progress. Ambedkar recognized the deep-seated inequalities in agrarian economy, particularly the unequal distribution of land and wealth, and highlighted how these inequalities perpetuated poverty and social injustice.

In *'Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies'*, Ambedkar identified the fragmentation of landholdings and unequal access to land as critical barriers to economic progress. He argued that small and uneconomical holdings, coupled with the concentration of land in the hands of a few, led to declining agricultural productivity and worsening living standards for the rural poor. His solution was to implement land reforms that redistributed land to the landless, with a focus on empowering backward and untouchable castes. This approach was not merely economic but also social, as it sought to break the cycle of caste-based oppression by giving marginalized communities a stake in economic resources.

In *'The Problem of the Rupee'*, Ambedkar demonstrated his understanding of global economic theories and critiqued the colonial economic policies that exacerbated inequality in India. He analysed the impact of the British monetary system on the Indian economy, highlighting how it favoured British interests at the expense of Indian development. His analysis underscored his broader concern about the unequal distribution of wealth and the exploitative nature of colonial economic practices.

Ambedkar advocated for comprehensive economic reforms to address wealth inequality and ensure that marginalized communities could access opportunities for growth and development. These reforms included land redistribution, investment in education, and policies to promote social mobility. He proposed a model of state socialism where the government would play a central role in managing resources and ensuring equitable distribution. He emphasized the need for state ownership of key industries, such as agriculture, mining, and infrastructure, to prevent monopolies and reduce disparities. Moreover, education was central to his vision for economic and social reform. He believed

that providing education to marginalized groups, especially women and Dalits, was essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling participation in the modern economy.

Ambedkar championed the economic and social empowerment of women, recognizing their critical role in shaping society. He advocated for women's access to education, employment, and property rights, which he saw as fundamental to achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive development. Furthermore, he believed that embracing modern technology and industrial practices was crucial for economic transformation in India. He saw technological progress as a means to increase productivity, reduce manual labour, and create a more equitable economic system.

The advocacy of Dr. Ambedkar for social equality extended far beyond the realm of politics and into the welfare of workers. He worked tirelessly with labour unions in industrialized regions like Bombay to improve working conditions, secure fair wages, and establish labour rights. His socialist leanings were rooted in his unwavering belief that economic equality could only be achieved by improving the conditions of the working class. His vision for social justice and equality was multifaceted, encompassing not only economic policies but also a fundamental transformation of society. He dreamed of a society free from the shackles of caste-based discrimination and social inertia, where economic development was inextricably linked to social mobility and reform. In his view, dismantling the caste system and social hierarchies was essential for achieving sustainable economic progress.

Conclusion: The vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for society, state, and governance was a comprehensive blueprint for creating a just and equitable social order. His vision of social justice and equality was a comprehensive framework that addressed the moral, social, economic, and political dimensions of caste discrimination. He recognised the interconnectedness of these issues and called for a holistic approach to addressing them. He believed that the state had a critical role in addressing social and economic inequalities and that governance must be inclusive and accountable. His emphasis on education, economic reforms, and democratic governance reflected his belief in the transformative power of knowledge, opportunity, and representation. Education was at the heart of the vision of Dr. Ambedkar for empowerment. He viewed it as a powerful tool for breaking the shackles of caste-based discrimination and poverty. By advocating for universal access to education, he aimed to equip marginalized communities with the knowledge and skills needed to improve their socio-economic conditions and participate fully in the process of development. Education, for Ambedkar, was not just a means of personal advancement but a cornerstone of social reform and a pathway to equality.

His vision was not just about improving the conditions of marginalised communities but about creating a society where every individual could live with dignity and pursue their aspirations without the constraints of caste or social hierarchy. Through his tireless efforts and unwavering commitment, Ambedkar laid the foundation for a more just and equitable

India. His legacy continues to inspire movements for social justice and equality, reminding us of the importance of challenging oppression and promoting inclusion in all spheres of life.

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