

135TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

NEWS: The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid tribute to Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Ambedkar on his birth anniversary 14th April.

- In 2025, India marks the 135th birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a relentless crusader for social justice, equality, and human dignity.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

About Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar

- He was a politician, economist, and social reformer popularly known as **Babasaheb Ambedkar**.
- He was born on **April 14, 1891 near Indore, now Madhya Pradesh**.
 - He belonged to the Mahar Family in Mhow.
- Dr. Ambedkar was the **Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution**.
 - He is recognised as the **“father of our Constitution”**.
 - He served as **India’s first Law Minister after independence**.
 - He later resigned from the post due to a difference of opinion over **the Hindu Code Bill**.
- **Buddhism: In 1956, he embraced Buddhism with many of his followers.**
- **Mahaparinirvan Diwas** is observed annually on **December 6 (1956)** to commemorate his death anniversary (1956).
- He was **awarded Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1990**.
- **Political Participation:**
 - **Three Round Table Conferences (1930-32):** Dr. Ambedkar went to all three Round Table Conferences **(1930-32) in London**, where he strongly advocated for the rights of the ‘untouchables’.
 - **Poona Pact with Gandhiji:** Dr. Ambedkar was in favor of a **separate electorate** for several communities including the ‘depressed classes’ Under the **‘Communal Award**, announced by **Ramsay McDonald**.
 - However, In 1932, Gandhi protested the **Communal Award’s separate electorate** by fasting while in Yerwada Central Jail.

- This led to the Poona Pact, where Gandhi ended his fast and Ambedkar withdrew the demand for a separate electorate.
- Instead, a set number of seats were reserved for the '**Depressed Class**'.
- **Independent Labour Party and Provincial Elections:** In 1936, Dr. Ambedkar organized the Independent Labour Party.
- He participated in the provincial elections and won a seat in the **Bombay Legislative Assembly**.
 - During this time, he advocated for ending the '**Jagirdari**' system and supported **workers' strike rights**.
- **Second World War:** In 1939, during World War II, Dr Ambedkar encouraged Indians to join the Army to fight against Nazism, which he saw as **similar to Fascism**.

Major Contributions

- Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar played a major role in **improving the lives of marginalized communities**.
- He introduced **reservations for Dalits** and other religious groups.
- His major contributions are in the areas of **fundamental rights, strong central government and protection of minorities**.
 - Dr. Ambedkar described **Article 32** as the "**soul of the Constitution**"
 - **Support for Strong Central Government:** Ambedkar favored a powerful central government.
 - **Protection for Minorities:** He believed that democracy's '**One man one vote**' principle wasn't enough as the minority was the most vulnerable group in the nation.

Major Social reform movements and initiatives led by him

- **Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association):** In 1923, Dr. Ambedkar founded this Sabha to promote education and culture among downtrodden communities.
- **Mahad March:** In 1927, Ambedkar organized the Mahad March at Chowdar Tank.
 - It started the movement against caste discrimination and priestly dominance.

- Mahad Satyagraha is also known as **Chavdar Tale Satyagraha**.
 - **Objective:** The objective of this Satyagraha was to allow untouchables to use water in a public tank in Mahad (currently in Raigad district), Maharashtra, India.
 - **20 March** is celebrated as **Social Empowerment Day** in India.
- **The Temple Entry Movement:** It was initiated by **Dr. Ambedkar in 1930** at **Kalaram temple, Nashik**.
 - This movement demanded that lower caste people enter temples and use temple wells.
 - Through this movement, Dr. Ambedkar advocated Equal status for lower-caste people
 - **Objective:** This movement aimed to reform **Hindu society by challenging caste-based discrimination**.

Literary works

- **Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development (1916):** Explores the intricacies of the caste system in India.
- **The Problem of the Rupee: Its origin and its solution (1923):** Delves into the Indian rupee and its economic implications.
- **Bahishkrut Bharat (India Ostracized) (1927):** Examines the plight of the marginalized communities in India.
- **Annihilation of Caste (1936):** Criticize the caste system and advocates for its eradication.
- **The Buddha and His Dhamma (1957):** Reinterprets Buddhism as a rational, ethical, and socially transformative philosophy.
- **Waiting for a Visa (1936):** An autobiographical account of Ambedkar's life and experiences.

Ambedkar on Political Philosophy & Swaraj

- **Ambedkar's Vision of Swaraj:** Not just political freedom but **liberation from caste oppression**.
 - Awakening of marginalized groups (Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs) to their **social servitude and political dependency**.

- **Social Justice & Constitutional Democracy:** Ambedkar framed India's Constitution to ensure **inclusive policies** (reservations, affirmative action).
 - Advocated **distributive justice**—State must uplift disadvantaged groups.
 - **Reservation policy** aimed at democratizing power structures.
- **Critique of State's Role:** State acts as a **benevolent guardian**, but marginalized groups remain **dependent**.
 - Policies lead to **slow, symbolic changes** without dismantling traditional power hierarchies.
- **Republican Democracy:** Inspired by **European republicanism** (overthrow of monarchy).
 - Marginalized groups must **assert collective power** against dominant elites.
 - **Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi unity** needed to challenge Brahmanical hegemony.

Ambedkar on Social Justice & the Caste System

- **Caste as a Hierarchical Social Oppression:** Ambedkar argued that caste was not just a division of labor but a **division of laborers**, enforced through endogamy and untouchability.
 - The **Manusmriti** codified caste duties, relegating Dalits to “polluting” occupations (e.g., manual scavenging).
- **Annihilation of Caste for True Democracy:** He believed political democracy was meaningless without **social democracy**—destroying caste to achieve equality.
 - In *Annihilation of Caste (1936)*, he called for dismantling Hindu scriptures that legitimized caste.
 - India's **Constitution (Articles 15-17)** abolished untouchability, but caste-based violence persists. (NCRB: 45,935 caste crimes in 2022)
- **Reservations as Reparative Justice:** Ambedkar saw reservations (Article 16) as **temporary affirmative action** to correct historical exclusion.
 - The **Poona Pact (1932)** secured reserved seats for Dalits in legislatures (though he initially demanded separate electorates).
- **Education as Liberation:** He stressed education to break caste barriers, founding **People's Education Society (1945)** for Dalit students.
 - **Siddharth College (Mumbai)** was among India's first Dalit-run institutions.

- Founded by the People's Education Society, which was established by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.
- **Religious Conversion as Resistance:** Ambedkar embraced **Buddhism (1956)** to escape caste oppression, seeing it as an egalitarian alternative.
 - **Deekshabhoomi (Nagpur)** marks where 500,000 Dalits converted with him.
- **Women's Rights & Caste Intersectionality:** He linked caste oppression with gender oppression, advocating **Hindu Code Bill (1951)** for women's inheritance rights.
 - **Savita Ambedkar**, his wife, symbolized educated Dalit women's empowerment.

Ambedkar on Religion and Buddhism

- **Religion Must Be Rational and Ethical:** Ambedkar believed that any religion based **only on belief and not amenable to reason** was erroneous.
 - Criticised Hinduism for **rigid dogma and irrational caste codes**, especially as codified in *Manusmriti*.
- **Critique of Hinduism:** Described Hinduism as a system that institutionalised **graded inequality**, especially through the **law of Karma and status by birth**.
 - **Caste as Religious Oppression:** Argued that Hinduism **sanctified caste hierarchy** through texts like *Manusmriti*.
 - **Rejection of Varnashrama:** Called it a **tool of Brahminical dominance**, denying dignity to Shudras and Dalits.
 - **No Reform Possible:** Believed Hinduism could **not be reformed** from within due to its scriptural basis for inequality.
- **Buddhism as a Rational Alternative:** Embraced Buddhism in 1956 after a life-long critique of Hindu social structure.
 - **Why Buddhism?**
 - **Rational & Egalitarian:** Praised Buddhism for rejecting **rituals, priesthood, and caste**.
 - **Four Noble Truths:** Aligned with his focus on **ending suffering (dukkha)** caused by caste oppression.
 - **Dhamma as Social Democracy:** Emphasized **equality (sama), liberty (mukti), and fraternity (maitri)**.

- In his work *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he traced the values of **liberty, equality, fraternity** to Buddhist teachings—not the French Revolution.
- **Great Conversion to Buddhism (1956):** Ambedkar led lakhs of Dalits in renouncing Hinduism and accepting Buddhism.
 - **Dr Ambedkar took 22 vows** while converting to Buddhism.
 - Included rejection of Hindu gods, karma theory, and caste practices; embraced Buddhist ethics.
 - Saw it as an act of **self-respect, social rebellion, and ethical transformation.**
- **Navayana Buddhism**
 - Also known as **Neo-Buddhism or Ambedkarite Buddhism.**
 - Navayana Buddhism, meaning “**new vehicle**” in Sanskrit, is a form of Buddhism distinct from **Theravada and Mahayana.**
 - It was developed by **B.R. Ambedkar** as a **reinterpretation of traditional Buddhist teachings**, rejecting aspects like karma, rebirth, and monasticism, while emphasizing social equality and fraternity.
 - **Engaged Buddhism:** Focused on **education, activism, and political empowerment** of Dalits.

Ambedkar’s Economic Vision

- **Critique of Caste-Based Economic Exploitation:** Ambedkar argued that the caste system perpetuated economic inequality by restricting occupational mobility and enforcing unpaid or underpaid labor (e.g., Dalits in agrarian economies).
 - The **Mahad Satyagraha (1927)** highlighted how caste denied access to public water tanks, symbolizing economic exclusion.
- **State-Led Industrialization:** He advocated for state intervention to dismantle feudal structures and promote industrialization, ensuring equitable growth.
 - Drafted the **Damodar Valley Corporation Bill (1948)**, modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority, to integrate infrastructure development with social welfare.
- **Land Reforms and Agricultural Modernization:** Ambedkar emphasized land redistribution to break caste-linked landownership patterns.
 - Proposed collective farming in his work “*States and Minorities*” (1947) to counter Brahminical land monopolies.

- **Labor Rights and Social Security:** He championed fair wages, unionization, and protections for workers, especially marginalized groups.
 - As Labour Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council (1942–46), he introduced the **8-hour workday** and **maternity benefits**.
- **Financial Inclusion and Reserve Bank of India (RBI):** Ambedkar’s thesis *The Problem of the Rupee* (1923) laid the groundwork for India’s monetary policy.
 - His recommendations shaped the **RBI Act (1934)**, emphasizing central bank autonomy to stabilize currency.
- **Critique of Marxism and Alternative Socialism:** While sympathetic to class struggle, he rejected Marx’s neglect of caste. In his speech “*Buddha or Karl Marx*” (1956), he proposed Buddhist socialism.
 - **Navayana Buddhism’s** emphasis on collective welfare mirrored his economic ideals.

Ambedkar vs. Gandhi

Aspect	B.R. Ambedkar	M.K. Gandhi
Approach to Caste	Advocated annihilation of caste as inherently oppressive. Called Hinduism a “religion of rules” upholding hierarchy.	Sought reform within Hinduism (e.g., calling Dalits <i>Harijans</i>). Believed caste could be purified, not abolished.
Untouchability	Demanded legal abolition (Article 17 of Constitution). Led Mahad Satyagraha (1927) for water rights.	Condemned untouchability but framed it as a moral issue, not structural (Harijan upliftment campaigns).
Political Representation	Poona Pact (1932): Compromised on separate electorates for reserved seats after Gandhi’s fast. Initially wanted separate electorates for Dalits.	Opposed separate electorates, fearing division. Supported joint electorates with reservations .
Economic Justice	State-led socialism: Land reforms, labor rights,	Village-centric economy: Focused on self-reliance

	industrialization. Drafted labor laws (8-hour workday).	(<i>Swadeshi</i>), hand-spinning (<i>charkha</i>). Opposed industrialization.
Religion & Social Reform	Converted to Buddhism (1956) to escape caste. Criticized Hinduism's scriptures (<i>Manusmriti</i> burning, 1927).	Orthodox Hindu: Defended <i>varnashrama</i> (caste duties) but rejected untouchability.
Education	Modern education as liberation: Founded colleges (Siddharth College) for Dalits.	Basic education (Nai Talim): Focused on vocational training for rural masses.
Women's Rights	Progressive: Hindu Code Bill (1951) for divorce, inheritance rights. Called women's oppression caste-linked.	Conservative: Upliftment within the existing social structure.
Vision for India	Constitutional democracy with state-enforced equality (reservations, labor laws).	Moral democracy (<i>Ram Rajya</i>) based on village self-governance.

Ambedkar vs. Marx

Aspect	B.R. Ambedkar	Karl Marx
Core Issue of Oppression	Caste-based inequality (graded hierarchy)	Class-based exploitation (bourgeois vs. proletariat)
View on Human Rights	Transformative tools for liberation; essential for dignity	Bourgeois illusion that masks real exploitation
Means of Revolution	Democratic, legal, and constitutional methods	Violent class struggle and overthrow of capitalism

Role of Religion	Embraced Buddhism — a rational, ethical faith	Called religion the “opium of the masses”
Social Vision	Social democracy grounded in liberty, equality, fraternity	Classless, stateless society after proletarian revolution
Indian Context Relevance	Addressed caste+class oppression through reservations, laws, education	Class-only focus ineffective in caste-driven Indian society

Relevance of Ambedkar in Present Times

The legacy of Dr. Ambedkar is very significant today too.

- **Constitutional Values:** As the chief architect of the Indian constitution, he included **fundamental rights, democratic principles, and secularism** in the legal framework of India.
 - These constitutional values guide our actions, legal battles, and debates today too.
- **Social Justice:** Dr. Ambedkar fought against **caste-discrimination, inequality, and untouchability** to establish a more inclusive society.
 - He focused on the systematic issues of the society and made special provisions in the constitution for the upliftment of marginalized societies.
- **Guide for Policymakers:** Ambedkar’s principles and his clarity of social structures, and democracy help the policymakers in understanding the ground reality of societal issues and struggles of the marginalized groups.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s legacy as the architect of India’s Constitution and a champion of social justice remains foundational to modern India. His vision of equality, liberty, and fraternity continues to guide the fight against caste oppression, economic inequality, and discrimination. As India progresses, his ideals remind us that true democracy must be rooted in both legal safeguards and transformative social change.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/ambedkar-javanti-ideal-society-annihilation-of-caste-9942388/>

