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OFFICE of
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Celebrating

THE LEGACY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY



DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

14 APRIL 1891 – 6 DECEMBER 1956

“**AMBEDKAR JAYANTI
SPECIAL EDITION**”

OFFICE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (I.D.E.A.S.),
O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY



Introduction to Edition:

THIS SPECIAL EDITION, PREPARED ON AMBEDKAR JAYANTI, IS AN INTRODUCTORY RESOURCE FOR ANYONE WHO WISHES TO BEGIN UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE AND IDEAS OF B. R. AMBEDKAR.

IT BRINGS TOGETHER A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE, A SELECTION OF ESSENTIAL READINGS, FROM HIS THOUGHTS, AND A FEW VISUAL GLIMPSES. THE AIM IS TO MAKE AMBEDKAR'S IDEAS ACCESSIBLE TO NEW READERS, WHILE ENCOURAGING FURTHER EXPLORATION INTO HIS WORK AND ITS CONTINUED RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.

SECTION 1

B.R. AMBEDKAR: LIFE, THEMES, AND INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Born in 1891 into an untouchable family, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is the acknowledged modern Indian leader of the struggle against social injustice. He was a jurist, economist, political thinker, and Philosopher. As Gail Omvedt documents in *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India* (2005), his journey from caste-bound poverty to becoming a jurist of international standing is one of the most remarkable intellectual and political trajectories in modern history.

Before he became a constitutional architect and social reformer, Ambedkar was, first and foremost, a trained economist. He had a doctorate in Economics from the London School of Economics, and his important economic ideas included advocating for a gold standard, decentralizing government finance, and consolidating land holdings in agriculture to achieve economies of scale. His major economic writings include *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*, *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*, and *Administration and Finance of the East India Company*, alongside his seminal paper "Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies." Notably, his D.Sc. thesis on the problem of the rupee served as a guiding tool for the RBI Act of 1934. On agrarian questions, Ambedkar stressed the need for thoroughgoing land reforms, arguing that the smallness or largeness of an agricultural holding is not determined by its physical extent alone, but by the intensity of cultivation and productive investment. He advocated the nationalization of land and its leasing to groups of cultivators encouraged to form cooperatives. As economist Amartya Sen has remarked, "Ambedkar is my father in Economics... his contribution in the field of economics is marvellous."

Ambedkar's scholarly output was prolific. In his seminal work *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), he challenged caste not merely as a social hierarchy but as a deeply entrenched ideology sustained by religious texts and Brahminical authority, arguing that caste is not merely a division

of labor but a division of laborers rooted in graded inequality. His text *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946) offered a historical-materialist account of caste formation, while *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957) outlined an egalitarian philosophy grounded in compassion and rational autonomy. His key works from *Castes in India* (1916) through *States and Minorities* (1947) also engaged themes of constitutional law, gender reform through the Hindu Code Bill, and the ethical-political implications of what he called Navayana Buddhism.

Christophe Jaffrelot, in *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability* (Columbia University Press, 2005), focuses on Ambedkar's three key roles: as social theorist, as statesman and politician, and as an advocate of conversion to Buddhism as an escape route for India's Dalits. Eleanor Zelliot, whose *From Untouchable to Dalit* (1992) was the first major academic study of the Dalit movement in English, underscores that Ambedkar's works acted as both intellectual catalysts and ideological beacons for Dalit writers, inspiring them to employ the written word as a tool for liberation.

As framer of India's Constitution and founder of a new order of Buddhism, Ambedkar contextualizes Ambedkar's argument with elite nationalists particularly Gandhi that India could never be truly free without the liberation of its most oppressed sections. His thought remains indispensable to understanding the paradoxes of contemporary India. He developed an original framework where social democracy based on liberty, equality, and fraternity was central to political democracy.

As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar embedded principles of social justice, affirmative action, and fundamental rights into the framework of the modern Indian state.

SECTION 2

TIMELINE

1891 — Born in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. Child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal, a retired army officer.

1913 — Leaves for Columbia University on a Baroda State scholarship. Studies under the philosopher John Dewey, who will influence how Ambedkar thinks about democracy for the rest of his life.

1923 — Submits his doctoral thesis at the London School of Economics, later published as *The Problem of the Rupee*. Its recommendations fed directly into the creation of the Reserve Bank of India.

1927 — Leads the Mahad Satyagraha — a public assertion of the right of untouchables to draw water from a public tank. Publicly burns a copy of the Manusmriti.

1932 — Negotiates the Poona Pact with Gandhi after a fast-unto-death standoff over separate electorates for Dalits. A political compromise Ambedkar never fully made peace with.

1935 — Declares at Yeola: "I was born a Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu." A statement that takes twenty more years to act on.

1936 — Writes *Annihilation of Caste* for a conference in Lahore. The organisers cancel the conference rather than let him deliver it. He self-publishes it.

1947–49 — Serves as India's first Law Minister and chairs the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution — with its abolition of untouchability, equality provisions, and affirmative action clauses — is his most lasting achievement.

1956 — Converts to Buddhism in Nagpur on 14 October, along with roughly five hundred thousand followers. Dies on 6 December

SECTION 3

AMBEDKAR'S OWN WRITINGS

Annihilation of Caste (1936): The most important thing Ambedkar ever wrote, and the best place to start. It was originally a speech — one that conference organisers in Lahore refused to let him deliver, fearing it too radical. He self-published it instead. It argues that caste cannot be reformed from within; it has to be dismantled at its religious root. The Navayana annotated edition (2014), with a long introduction by Arundhati Roy, is the most useful version for new readers.

Read free: <https://archive.org/details/AnnihilationOfCasteDr.B.r.ambedkar> Buy (Navayana annotated edition): <https://navayana.org/products/annihilation-of-caste/>

Waiting for a Visa (written 1935–36) A short autobiographical account of Ambedkar's encounters with caste discrimination — being refused lodging, water, basic dignity. Written plainly, without melodrama, which is what makes it so difficult to read. It is used as a classroom text at Columbia University and is freely available online.

Read free: https://franpritchett.com/ooambedkar/txt_ambedkar_waiting.html

The Buddha and His Dhamma (1956) Ambedkar's last major work, completed just before his death. It presents Buddhism not as renunciation but as a rational, socially engaged philosophy of liberation. It explains, more than anything else, why he converted — and what he was converting to.

Read free (via BAWS): <https://drambedkarwritings.gov.in/>

The Problem of the Rupee (1923) Ambedkar's doctoral dissertation at the LSE. A rigorous analysis of India's currency and monetary policy under British rule. Its recommendations influenced the creation of the Reserve Bank of India. A reminder that before everything else, Ambedkar was an economist.

Read free: <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.122836>

The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman (1950) A historical and philosophical examination of the position of women in Hindu society. Ambedkar saw caste and patriarchy as inseparable structures. His championing of the Hindu Code Bill — and his resignation when Nehru's cabinet refused to pass it — was a direct consequence of this view. Available in Volume 17 of his complete writings.

Read free: <https://drambedkarwritings.gov.in/>

Complete Writings and Speeches (BAWS) The Government of India has made the complete Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches freely available online. All volumes. Everything is here.

Read free: <https://drambedkarwritings.gov.in/> Also on Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/Dr.BabasahebAmbedkarWritingsAndSpeechespdfsAllVolumes>

SECTION 4

SECONDARY RESOURCES (THE WORK ON HIM)

Becoming Babasaheb: The Life and Times of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Vol. 1 — Aakash Singh Rathore (HarperCollins India, 2023) The first volume of what is shaping up to be the definitive English-language biography — covering from his birth in 1891 through the Mahad Satyagraha in 1929. Rigorously researched and well-written. The best biography currently available in English.

Publisher page: <https://www.harpercollins.co.in/>

Ambedkar's Preamble: A Secret History of the Constitution of India — Aakash Singh Rathore (Vintage, 2020) A close reading of the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, recovering the Ambedkarite philosophy embedded in its language. Short and precise. Makes you re-read a document you thought you already knew.

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/51895001>

Annihilation of Caste (Navayana annotated edition) — with introduction "The Doctor and the Saint" by Arundhati Roy (2014) Roy's introduction is essentially a standalone essay on the debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Polemical and useful, particularly for readers who come to Ambedkar having grown up with the standard Gandhi narrative.

Publisher: <https://navayana.org/products/annihilation-of-caste/> Read excerpt ("The Doctor and the Saint"): <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/the-doctor-and-the-saint>

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents — Isabel Wilkerson (Random House, 2020) An American writer draws on Ambedkar's analysis of caste to understand structures of hierarchy in the United States and Germany. Brought Ambedkar to a wide global readership. Also the book that prompted Ava DuVernay's film *Origin*.

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/51152447>

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life — Omprakash Valmiki (Columbia University Press, 2003) Not about Ambedkar, but essential to understanding the world he was fighting to change. A landmark Dalit autobiography by the Hindi writer Omprakash Valmiki, describing his childhood in a village in western Uttar Pradesh. Blunt and irreplaceable.

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/441573>

The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar — edited by Valerian Rodrigues (Oxford University Press, 2002) A well-curated anthology spanning four decades of Ambedkar's work, organised by theme. A good second step after reading *Annihilation of Caste*, if you want a structured overview of his thinking across different domains.

Google Books: <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=pmcMAQAAMAAJ>

SECTION 5

AMBEDKAR IN CINEMA

- **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (2000)** Dir. Jabbar Patel. Starring Mammooty. Hindi. The definitive cinematic account of Ambedkar's life. Produced by the NFDC and directed by veteran Marathi filmmaker Jabbar Patel, with a central performance by Mammooty that is considered among the finest in Indian biographical cinema. Long and demanding, but worth it. IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0211694/>
- **Jai Bhim Comrade (2011)** Dir. Anand Patwardhan. Documentary. 169 minutes. Shot over fourteen years following the 1997 police killing of Dalit protesters at Ramabai Colony in Mumbai. Less a film about Ambedkar the individual than about the living tradition of Ambedkarite resistance — its music, its poetry, its grief. Described by critics as among the most important documentaries to emerge from the subcontinent. Available to watch free on YouTube (search "Jai Bhim Comrade Patwardhan") and on OVID.tv. Director's website: <https://patwardhan.com/jai-bhim-comrade/> OVID.tv: <https://www.ovid.tv/videos/jai-bhim-comrade> IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2157192/>
- **Jai Bhim (2021)** Dir. T.J. Gnanavel. Tamil. Amazon Prime. A courtroom drama based on the true story of a lawyer — inspired by Justice K. Chandru — who fights for a pregnant Irular tribal woman after her husband disappears in police custody. Commercially successful and morally serious. One of the most direct cinematic engagements with Ambedkarite legal thought. Amazon Prime: <https://www.primevideo.com/> IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15097216/>
- **India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart (2007)** Dir. Stalin K. Documentary. 110 minutes. Travels across twelve Indian states — through Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian communities — to document the continued practice of untouchability. Methodical and devastating in its accumulation of evidence. Award-winning. IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1136006/>

- **Samvidhan (2014)** Dir. Shyam Benegal. TV series. Rajya Sabha TV. A ten-episode dramatised account of the making of India's Constitution. Sachin Khedekar plays Ambedkar in one of the more nuanced portrayals of him in Indian television. Freely available on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=samvidhan+shyam+benegal
- **Article 15 (2019)** Dir. Anubhav Sinha. Hindi. Starring Ayushmann Khurrana. A mainstream Hindi film about caste violence in rural Uttar Pradesh, following an IPS officer who begins to understand what the system actually looks like from the bottom. Not Dalit cinema in the full sense — the protagonist is upper-caste — but a significant step in popular Hindi cinema's engagement with caste. MDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9333900/>
- **Fandry (2013)** Dir. Nagraj Manjule. Marathi. Not about Ambedkar directly, but of the world that requires him. A low-budget Marathi film about a Dalit teenager in a small Maharashtra village — his desires, his humiliations, his rage. One of the finest Indian films of the last two decades. IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3282512/>
- **Origin (2023)** Dir. Ava DuVernay. Based on Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. A Hollywood film that placed Ambedkar in a global conversation about systems of hierarchy — alongside American racism and European antisemitism. Introduced many international viewers to his name for the first time. Available on streaming platforms. IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14826466/>

SECTION 6

ARTICLES AND ACADEMIC WRITINGS

B.R. Ambedkar on Caste, Democracy, and State Action" — Hari Ramesh Political Theory, SAGE Journals, 2022. A careful scholarly recovery of Ambedkar's argument that the state must be an active agent of transformation, not a neutral referee. Challenges the tendency to read Ambedkar purely as a constitutionalist. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00905917211069607>

Ambedkar's Constitution: Did It Help the Dalits?" CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion, Vol. 2, No. 1, Brandeis University. A rigorous examination of whether the constitutional provisions Ambedkar championed have delivered what he hoped. The conclusion is complicated and worth sitting with. <https://journals.library.brandeis.edu/index.php/caste/article/download/282/63/1050>

"Caste as an Economic Institution: Formalizing Ambedkar's Theory of Graded Inequality" — Sandeep Chawda Research Review Journal of Social Science, 2025. An attempt to formalise Ambedkar's economic critique of caste using contemporary methods — showing how caste operates as a labour market institution that systematically restricts mobility. Bridges his 1930s arguments with current data. <https://rrjournals.co.in/index.php/rrjss/article/view/135>

"Revisiting Ambedkar's Thought: The Three Major Interpretations" — Swamy Kalva Contemporary Voice of Dalit, SAGE, 2025. Maps the ongoing debates among Ambedkarite intellectuals — the Marxist, the capitalist-Dalit, and the Buddhist frameworks — about how to interpret his legacy in the era of liberalisation. A useful guide to a living, contested tradition. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2455328X251343249>

Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy" — Arun P. Mukherjee *New Literary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2009. An examination of the intellectual relationship between Ambedkar and his Columbia professor Dewey — and how Ambedkar transformed Dewey's pragmatism to produce a theory of democracy suited to conditions Dewey had never encountered. Project MUSE: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/268278>

EPW Ambedkar Archive — Economic and Political Weekly Over decades, EPW has published hundreds of pieces on Ambedkar's economics, politics, and legacy — by scholars including Sukhadeo Thorat, Anand Teltumbde, and Gopal Guru. The online archive is searchable. <https://www.epw.in/search-result.html?q=ambedkar>

"Problems of an Other's Making": B.R. Ambedkar, Caste, and Majoritarian Domination *American Political Science Review*, Cambridge Core, 2024. A recent piece in one of political science's most prestigious journals, bringing Ambedkar's thought into conversation with contemporary debates about majoritarianism and minority rights.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/problems-of-an-others-making-b-r-ambedkar-caste-and-majoritarian-domination/D632E0142EC315F7700F5FA039F6BB32>

SECTION 7

PHOTO GALLERY



Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR,
CHAIRMAN OF THE DRAFTING
COMMITTEE, PRESENTING THE
FINAL DRAFT OF THE INDIAN
CONSTITUTION TO DR. RAJEN-
DRA PRASAD ON 25 NOVEMBER,
1949

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
DR. AMBEDKAR BEING SWORN
IN AS INDIA'S FIRST LAW MINIS-
TER BY PRESIDENT DR RAJEN-
DRA PRASAD IN THE PRESENCE
OF PRIME MINISTER JAWA-
HARLAL NEHRU



Image Credit: Forwardpress



Image Credit: Sahapedia

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
WOMEN IN THE AMBEDKARITE
MOVEMENT: THE CHAVDAAR
TANK SATYAGRAHA AT MAHAAD



Image Credit: B.B.C

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
DR. AMBEDKAR SEATED IN THE
MIDDLE WITH MEMBERS OF
THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE OF
THE CONSTITUTION IN AUGUST
1947

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
DR. BR AMBEDKAR PRESIDING
OVER THE JOINT COLUMBIA BI-
CENTENNIAL –
AMERICAN ALUMNI BANQUET AT
NATIONAL SPORTS CLUB OF
INDIA, NEW DELHI, OCTOBER
30, 1954. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.



Image Credit: indian History Collective

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO:
A YOUNG AMBEDKAR DURING
HIS COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
DAYS. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

THE BUDDHA
AND
HIS DHAMMA

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BY

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ON 25 NOVEMBER 1949, THE DAY BEFORE THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ADOPTED THE CONSTITUTION, AMBEDKAR GAVE A SPEECH. HE SAID THAT INDIA WAS ENTERING A LIFE OF CONTRADICTIONS: POLITICAL EQUALITY ON ONE HAND, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY ON THE OTHER. HE WARNED THAT IF THAT CONTRADICTION WAS NOT ADDRESSED, POLITICAL DEMOCRACY WOULD EVENTUALLY BE IN PERIL.

THAT WARNING HAS NOT BECOME IRRELEVANT. READING AMBEDKAR IS NOT AN ACT OF COMMEMORATION. IT IS AN ACT OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE STRUCTURES HE NAMED, AND WITH HOW MUCH OF THE WORK HE STARTED REMAINS UNFINISHED. EVERYTHING MARKED "FREE" ABOVE COSTS NOTHING. START ANYWHERE.

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The Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDEAS) at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) serves as a university-wide platform for fostering interdisciplinary teaching, research, and community engagement across the social sciences. It brings together scholars, students, and practitioners to co-create knowledge and develop innovative responses to complex real-world challenges.

At its core, IDEAS operates as an intellectual incubator, supporting collaborative scholarship, experimental pedagogy, and research that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. Through its initiatives and field-based programmes, it promotes critical inquiry, applied learning, and engagement with pressing development concerns.

With a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary dialogue, global academic exchange, and community-linked research, IDEAS aims to cultivate a dynamic academic environment that connects theory with practice and advances socially relevant scholarship.