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## **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Upliftment of Depressed Classes in British India: Constitutional Safeguards and Social Justice**

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### **Abstract:**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar dedicated his life to the upliftment of India's socially and economically marginalized groups. Through tireless advocacy, legal reforms and institution-building, he transformed the struggle of the oppressed into a movement for equality and human dignity. This paper explores Ambedkar's initiatives, from early efforts like the founding of *Mook Nayak* and Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha to his role in the Simon Commission, Round Table Conferences and the landmark Poona Pact. It examines his strategies to ensure educational access, employment quotas and political representation for the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar's most enduring contribution was his leadership in framing the Indian Constitution, embedding Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles and special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These safeguards, rooted in his vision of a just society, laid the foundation for modern India's policies on social equity and human development.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, Depressed Classes, Social Justice, Scheduled Castes, Constitution of India, Poona Pact, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles.

### **Introduction:**

In a famous speech, Ambedkar said, "It is my solemn vow to die in the service and cause of those downtrodden people among whom I was born, I was brought up and I am living." He created a Marathi publication titled *Mook Nayak* in January 1920. He urged the oppressed to shake off their complacency. He persisted in his attempts to free the huddled masses and used every tool at his disposal to achieve this objective. On July 20 1924, he founded a Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha association. Spreading education to the economically disadvantaged is one of its primary goals. He launched Satyagraha with the support of the downtrodden classes and under the flag of society, making heroic efforts to attain social equality.

### **Ambedkar's contribution to the uplift of Depressed Classes in British India**

In his role as president of Bombay, Ambedkar gave a report on the government's constitution. He insisted that the oppressed be given proper legal counsel. He proposed that all members of the legislature be chosen, with quotas set for Muslims, the working class and British Indians.

When the Indian Statutory Commission (also known as the Simon Commission) arrived in India on May 29, 1928, Ambedkar presented a Statement on behalf of Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha about the education of the Depressed Classes. According to him, the Depressed Classes were not



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permitted to attend a Government School and there was no open school for them in the Bombay Presidency before to 1855. He proposed establishing new schools, dorms and scholarships to help economically disadvantaged students attend universities in India and beyond.

In addition, Ambedkar made a statement on behalf of Bahishkrita Hitakarini Sabha on the protections in place for the minority interests of the downtrodden. He suggested using things like population and socioeconomic standing to measure how much expression there is. It is the government's duty to promote education, eliminate bias in hiring and guarantee citizens' safety.

On November 23, 1928, The Government constituted a commission to examine into the educational and social- economic status of the impoverished classes. Often referred to as the State Committee, Ambedkar was a major member of the Committee. For the economic rehabilitation of the downtrodden sections, the Committee suggested scholarship programmes and a student hostel. It underlined the necessity to recruit depressed classes in the police. It advocated that the existing obstacle to the recruitment of the depressed classes in the army should be abolished and that an officer from a poor part of society should keep lists of competent applicants and encourage their recruitment.

Ambedkar played a pivotal role in drawing international and British attention to the plight of India's depressed classes and other marginalised groups during the Round Table Conferences held in London between 1930 and 1932. He argued that the caste system should be abolished and that untouchability should be made illegal for all official government functions in India's future constitution. Second, all previous limitations or prejudice must be wiped out by this basic human entitlement. He pushed for protections to guarantee the right to fair representation in the legislature. Ambedkar pushed for public sector employment of people from marginalised groups at the same convention.

A Supplementary Memorandum on the Claims of the Depressed Classes for Special Representation, outlining the specifics of the special protections, was presented by Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference on January 4, 1931. Ambedkar's efforts to bring about justice for India's lower castes ultimately persuaded the British government to back down. Separate electorates for the Depressed Classes were established on August 17, 1932, when Prime Minister Mac Donald proclaimed the Communal Award. The declaration seemed to be the climax of a protracted and contentious fight for the untouchables' right to fair and equitable representation. The sanctioning of a unique status for the downtrodden classes gave them something to look forward to.

Their happiness, however, did not last long. Gandhi's resolve to fast to death and protest the Communal Award was made public on August 18, 1932. But in the end, Ambedkar did agree to make changes to the Communal Award that Gandhi found satisfactory. The Poona Pact was



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signed on September 24, 1932, in Yeravada Prison by Ambedkar, Gandhi and others. The following points summarise his fight for untouchables' constitutional rights in British India:

The economically disadvantaged should have access to all available educational resources.

ii) Provide quotas for members of economically disadvantaged groups in state and federal government jobs.

All of the country's democratic entities should include members of the country's depressed classes.

iv. The underprivileged should have their own voting bloc.

The oppressed groups should have their own communities created up.

And on October 29, 1942, he wrote a secret Memorandum to India's Viceroy and Governor General asking them to take steps to increase the number of people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in key government positions including the Legislative, Executive, Public Services, Education, Contracts, etc. As a result, for the first time in India's history, the government set aside public services for economically disadvantaged groups. In addition, he successfully advocated for the government of India to fund international study abroad scholarships for bright students. Because to his efforts, in 1943, sixteen students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds began studying overseas.

## **Ambedkar and Constitutional safeguards to Scheduled Castes:**

Ambedkar's name is inextricably linked to the creation of India's free Constitution, both as its Chairperson and as a member of the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights. As the official spokesperson for the invincible, you have no rivals. Ambedkar took into account the needs of the Scheduled Castes when he helped design the Constitution. His stated goal in serving in the Constituent Assembly was to "safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes," as he put it.

### **1. The Fundamental Rights:**

Ambedkar, the defender of the weak, knew without a shadow of a doubt that the Indian Constitution must have a bill of Rights. He had been advocating nonstop for a comprehensive set of basic rights for all people in the country, not just those from certain groups. His leadership of the underdogs rested on his unwavering commitment to the cause of social justice. He was also persuaded that social justice could not be assured to one and all until it was incorporated in the Constitution itself. The Constituent Assembly prioritised social justice and nondiscrimination in its bill of rights, one of its first orders of business. A detailed charter of rights rapidly emerged via several phases in the Assembly and its Committees.

When compared to other Bill of Rights, the Fundamental Rights in the Indian Constitution are much more detailed and all-encompassing. Constitutional protections against bias and for advancing social justice guaranteed by the Bill of Rights:

First, Article 14 guarantees everyone equal protection under the law.



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Article 15 forbids discrimination on the basis of one's religion, race, caste, gender, or country of birth; Article 16 guarantees all citizens an equal shot at public service jobs; Article 17 ends untouchability; Article 18 does away with formal titles; Article 23 outlaws human trafficking and forced labour; and Article 23 also does away with titles.

The aforementioned clauses show that Ambedkar and the founding fathers worked hard to provide constitutional equality for the poor and oppressed. These rules were designed to eliminate discrimination, prejudice and other forms of social handicapping.

Finally, Ambedkar and the other founding fathers did the correct thing by stressing that the Constitution's goal was to construct an equal society in which rights were guaranteed not just to some but to all. They were certain that until wealth inequality was addressed, the right to equal opportunity would be meaningless. When widespread hunger forces most people to submit to the wishes of the few, political freedoms and personal autonomy are of little use. For individuals without a safe place to sleep, the property right is meaningless. Due to its attempt at striking a delicate balance between political and civil rights on the one hand and social and economic rights on the other, or between individual rights and demands of social justice, the Indian constitutional format on human rights stands out as a significant and unique attempt at conflict resolution. Philosophy proposing a two-way conversation between individuality and state control formed the basis of the whole programme.

## **2. The Directive Principles of State Policy**

Directive Principles aim to stress economic and social aims, whereas Fundamental Rights protect individuals' rights and freedoms against arbitrary State action. Reasons may be found rather easily. The founding fathers hoped that by writing guiding ideas and ideals into the constitution, the nation might undergo a social and economic transformation. Both Nehru and Ambedkar saw this revolution as crucial to India's continued existence.

The following are some of the terms Ambedkar used to support the Directive Principles of State Policy. Those who seize power will not be able to do as they choose. In the exercise, he will have to observe these instruments of teaching called Directive Principles. He can't afford to ignore them any longer. It's possible he won't have to answer legal questions about the breach. However, he will undoubtedly have to account for them before the people at election time. The true worth of these guiding principles will become apparent when the forces of right finally succeed in seizing power.

The Directive Principles, according to Ambedkar, were not meant to be empty religious rhetoric. "The Assembly intends that in the future, both the legislature and the executive should make these principles enacted in this Part the basis of all executive and legislative actions that may be taken in the future with respect to the governance of the country. To prevent the court from compelling the State to undertake a 'obligation' under the 'Directives,' the Constituent Assembly debated the



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non-justifiability provision in Article 37. Ambedkar provided the following defence of the provision. In the words of John Stuart Mill, "A State just awakened from freedom with its many preoccupations might be crushed under the burden unless it was free to decide the order, the time, the place and the mode of fulfilling them." The goal of the Directive Principles is to establish a fair social order free of economic exploitation and a welfare state. The core of these ideas is laid forth in Article 38, which states that the State must seek to further the welfare of the people by guaranteeing and safeguarding as effectively as it may a social order in education, society and politics.

### 3. Special Provisions

Part XVI of the Indian Constitution has rules that are unique for two groups of people: the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Articles 330 and 332 say that people from Scheduled Castes and Tribes must have places in the House of the People and the Legislative Assemblies of the States. Article 334 says that these kinds of reservations can only be made for ten years after the Constitution starts. Article 338 says that the President must select a Special Officer for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This officer's job is to look into all issues related to the protections given to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and report back to the President. Article 339 says that a committee should be set up to report on how the scheduled lands are managed and how the Scheduled Tribes are doing.

It's important to note that a lot of people in the Constituent Assembly didn't agree with the special rules that allowed reservations. While some thought it would reward being behind the times and inefficient, others saw them as the exact opposite of good government and efficiency. But most people seemed to agree that jobs should be set aside for people from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Ambedkar stressed how important this option was for meeting the needs of groups that haven't had a voice in the State before. The Constitution of India includes protections for human rights and social policy. Following these policies helped the untouchables grow as people. This means that Ambedkar is known as the "architect" of human resource development. The UNDP's study of Ambedkar's work is based on his scale and importance, which makes the case for a human development strategy. The human development school of thought in public policy today has its roots in Ambedkar's social policy.

The human development method says that the government should be involved and set rules for improving things like health, eating, schooling, protecting the environment and looking out for the interests of the poor and weak. Ambedkar's main tool was giving the Depressed Classes political power through the many protections built into the Indian Constitution. This helped to improve their social, economic, educational and cultural conditions, which helped them grow from poverty, social shame and pain. The way that S.C. and S.T. work together and vote in elections shows that





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they believe in Ambedkar's intellectual ideas and vision, as well as the protections that have been put in place to ensure social justice for the most troubled people in India.

## Conclusion:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life and work stand as a testament to the transformative power of vision, education and political action. He not only gave voice to India's most marginalized communities but also crafted enduring mechanisms to secure their rights. His founding of organizations, advocacy at national and international platforms and legal interventions brought the issues of untouchability and caste-based discrimination into mainstream political discourse. The Poona Pact and later constitutional guarantees reflected his belief in a society where dignity and opportunity are not privileges but rights. Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, shaped by his leadership, created a framework balancing individual freedoms with social welfare. Special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes ensured representation and paved the way for affirmative action. Ambedkar's policies were not mere legal safeguards; they were instruments of empowerment, turning centuries of exclusion into pathways of inclusion. Today, the human development strategies in education, employment and political participation bear his imprint, reaffirming that his mission to uplift the downtrodden remains relevant and unfinished.

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