Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision for Cultural Heritage Conservation: An Appraisal of His Ideological and Policy Contributions

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Abstract: *Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a great personality in Indian modern history, is celebrated primarily for his tireless fight against social discrimination and his important role in drafting the Indian Constitution. While his contributions to social justice and political reform are well documented, his perspectives on the preservation of Indian heritage are equally profound, yet less explored. Ambedkar's vision included a nuanced understanding of cultural preservation that combined the need to protect India's rich traditions with a critical appraisal of practices that perpetuated social inequalities. This research paper examines Ambedkar's views on the preservation of Indian heritage, his criticism of traditional structures, his advocacy for cultural reform, and his vision for a progressive, inclusive national identity. Furthermore, it traces his criticism of traditional practices, his selective approach to preserving or discarding elements of heritage, and his promotion of Buddhism as an egalitarian alternative to Brahmanical traditions. moreover, it assesses how Ambedkar's ideas inform modern India's approach to heritage and identity. The overall picture that emerges is of a thinker who considered justice and human dignity paramount, even if it meant rejecting time - honored customs, and who sought to redefine Indian identity on the basis of rational morality rather than ancestral dogma.*

1. Introduction

Architect of Modern Indian Constitution

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956 CE) was a visionary social reformer, jurist, economist and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution. Born into a Dalit (formerly untouchable) family, he became a powerful advocate for the rights of marginalized communities in India. An accomplished scholar with multiple doctorates from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, Ambedkar campaigned social justice, equality and education as apparatuses of empowerment. They led movements against caste discrimination, fought for labor rights, and ultimately adopted Buddhism as a means of spiritual and social liberation. His legacy remains the cornerstone of India's democratic and human rights framework (Chandrachud, 2024) .

Map related to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Related Sites

His perspectives on India's cultural heritage were equally nuanced and essential to his broader vision of nation -

building. Ambedkar's approach towards Indian heritage was remarkably critical and constructive. He recognized India's rich cultural and historical heritage but insisted on a selective preservation that is progressive, inclusive and consistent with democratic values. He strongly believed that cultural traditions and historical practices should never hinder social improvement or perpetuate inequality. Ambedkar's actions repeatedly reflect this conviction, especially in his speeches on **"abolition of caste"** and during the Constituent Assembly debates (Sabha, 1946) .

Ambedkar argued strongly against perpetuating hidden caste identity as a cultural heritage, saying, "You must make your efforts to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your own way" (Ambedkar, 1936 C. E.). This statement underlines his call to actively reject regressive traditions under the guise of heritage conservation.

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Furthermore, Ambedkar proposed that conservation should emphasize aspects of heritage that promote equality, social justice and human dignity. His vision included reviving the teachings of figures such as the Buddha, whose philosophy emphasized compassion, equality, and rationalism, providing the basis for a more humane and inclusive society. Ambedkar saw Buddhism as an integral part of India's progressive heritage and saw its revival as vital to overcoming caste oppression (Indian Cultural Forum, n. d.) .

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Ambedkar's advocacy for Buddhism was not merely religious but fundamentally cultural and social. His conversion to Buddhism in 1956 C. E., along with millions of his followers, was a powerful statement against caste - based discrimination embedded within Hindu cultural norms. Ambedkar accepted Buddhism as an alternative heritage progressive, rational and egalitarian which India should preserve and promote to build a just society (Ambedkar, 1987) .

He supported constitutional provisions protecting cultural diversity but cautioned against practices that violate human rights. Ambedkar's emphasis on fundamental rights in the Constitution served as a safeguard against repressive cultural practices, reflecting his belief that heritage conservation should be consistent with democratic principles and human dignity.

Ultimately, Ambedkar's views on Indian heritage advocate a sensible preservation that embraces progressive, egalitarian elements while explicitly rejecting traditions that perpetuate inequality. His legacy challenges contemporary India to critically and consciously preserve its rich heritage, linking cultural continuity with social justice and democratic values (Chandrachud, 2024) .

Ambedkar's criticism of traditional structures

Ambedkar's engagement with Indian heritage was marked by a critical examination of its fundamental structures, particularly the caste system. He argued that the caste system is not just a social hierarchy but a deeply rooted institution that fragments Indian society and hinders the formation of a unified national identity. In his seminal work, "Abolition of Caste", Ambedkar asserted that caste had "hampered and demoralized the Hindus", preventing Hinduism from becoming a missionary faith and functioning as an active force in society. He believed that unless caste was abolished, the concept of a united and progressive Indian society would remain elusive (OMVEDT, 2016) .

Moreover, Ambedkar challenged the inerrancy of ancient Hindu scriptures, questioning their moral and spiritual authority. In "**Riddles in Hinduism**" he examined the Vedas, highlighting contradictions and elements which he considered irrational or harmful to social progress. He argued that Brahmin theology had misled the masses, and rational criticism of these texts was necessary for social enlightenment. Ambedkar's approach was not a complete rejection of Indian heritage, but an invitation to critically evaluate and reform those aspects that perpetuate inequality and hinder progress (Sabha, 1946) .

Advocacy of cultural reform and social justice

Ambedkar's vision for the preservation of Indian heritage was intrinsically linked to his commitment to social justice. He believed that true conservation required eliminating discriminatory practices and promoting equality. His efforts to reform Hindu society included advocating reinterpretation of religious texts to align with contemporary values of justice and equality. Ambedkar stressed the need for a cultural renaissance that would abandon regressive practices and adopt principles conducive to social harmony.

One of Ambedkar's important contributions was his emphasis on education as a means of empowering marginalized communities. He believed that education was vital in breaking the chains of social oppression and enabling individuals to critically engage with their cultural heritage. By fostering an enlightened and informed population, Ambedkar aimed to create a society capable of preserving its rich cultural traditions as well as rejecting unjust or oppressive elements (Jaffrelot, 2005) .

Morality and National identity

As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar encapsulated his vision of cultural preservation within the framework of constitutional morality. He advocated a nation built on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, which he considered essential for the true preservation of India's diverse heritage. Ambedkar warned against the illusion of a unified nation amid deep social divisions, saying, "How can a people divided into several thousand castes be one nation?" He stressed that it is important to recognize and address these divisions to promote genuine national unity.

Map related with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Associated events
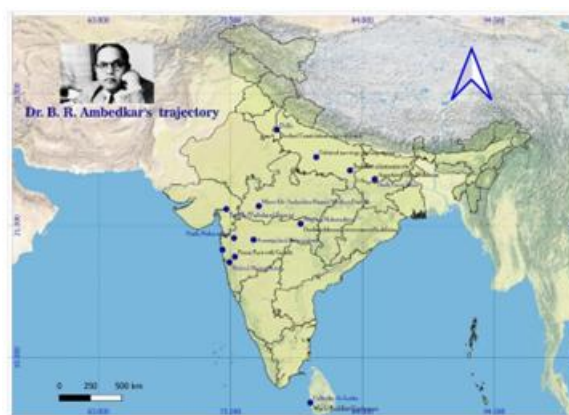
Ambedkar's view on the preservation of Indian heritage was nuanced and critical, He did not advocate blind reverence for the past, but a selective preservation guided by the principles of rationalism, equality and justice. In his Abolition of Caste (1936 CE), Ambedkar declared that his ideal society would be based on "**liberty, equality and fraternity**", emphasizing that these enlightened values should shape what aspects of heritage should be taken into account (Ambedkar, 2022)

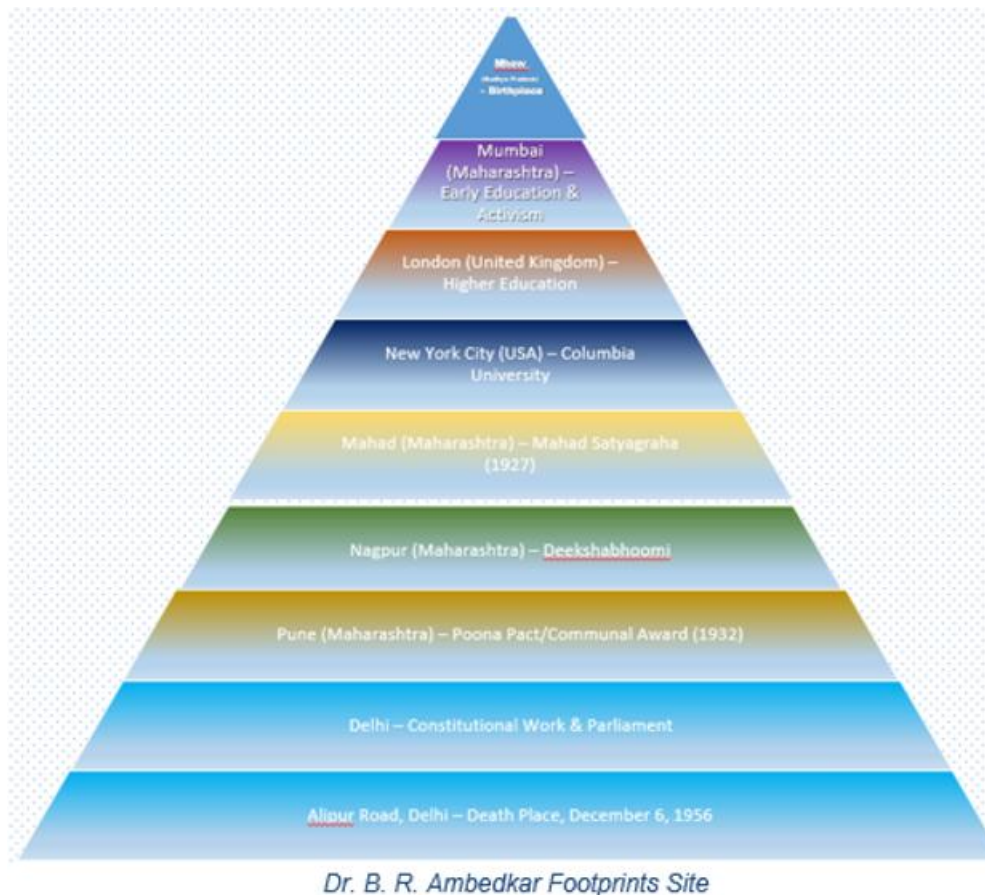### Cultural and Social Dimensions & Critique of Ambedkar's Tradition

Ambedkar's image as a champion of social justice and equality is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness, with his ideas resonating strongly with marginalized

communities (Jaoul, 2006) . Ambedkar viewed India's cultural heritage especially the Hindu social system with a critical eye. He believed that many traditional practices and beliefs preserved under the banner of "heritage" were actually hindering social progress and human rights. At the heart of Indian social heritage was the caste system, with its principles of purity, pollution, and hierarchical separation (Teltumbde & (eds.), 2020) . Born into the "untouchable" Mahar caste, Ambedkar had experienced first - hand the cruelties of this system. He concluded that preserving such oppressive traditions was neither desirable nor moral. In caste abolition, he posed a challenge to conservative Hindus "Hindus must consider whether they should preserve their entire social heritage or select what is useful and transmit to future generations only that much, and no more. "

 In other words, not everything inherited from the past is worth continuation rather society may filter out "dead wood" and distorted elements of heritage, retaining only what is conducive to a just future. Ambedkar studied at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916, and Dewey was his favorite teacher there. Ambedkar's writings quote widely from Dewey, especially his book Democracy and Education. Ambedkar was deeply influenced by Deweyan idea of democracy as "associated life" which went beyond electing a government at regular intervals. Indeed, for both Ambedkar and Dewey, this idea encapsulated their understanding of humans as both products of their social environment and as agents who continuously changed their social environment through communication and education (Mukherjee, 2009) . Ambedkar used these Deweyan ideas about the human and social life to critique the caste - based Hindu society, to fight for the rights of untouchables, and to envision an Indian democracy based on the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. Ambedkar reinforced this point by quoting his former teacher John Dewey "Every society is surrounded by things that are trivial, by the waste wood of the past, and by what is positively deformed. As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is not responsible for preserving and disseminating all its existing achievements, but only for such actions as produce a better future society. " Thus, he argued, social change even radical change is often necessary

for the true preservation of a society's core values. Echoing the British statesman Edmund Burke, Ambedkar said that "a state without the means of transformation is without the means of its own preservation. " According to this logic, blindly clinging to archaic customs can actually undermine the continuity and integrity of a society. Ambedkar's cultural philosophy urged Indians to stop worshiping the past and instead subject their traditions to the scrutiny of reason.

A radical aspect of Ambedkar's social criticism focused on the religious sanctity of caste and inequality. He argued that Hindu scriptures (texts considered authorities on religion) were the ideological root of the casteist legacy. In his view, it was necessary to challenge these revered texts for lasting social reform. Ambedkar wrote, "It is not the people who practice caste, but the scriptures teach them this religion of caste, " stressing that "the real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the scriptures" (Kisana, 2023) . As long as society believes that an unequal social order is divinely ordained, progress will be blocked. Ambedkar clearly insisted "You must not only abandon the scriptures but also deny their authority, as Buddha and Nanak did. " This call appealing the examples of Buddha and Guru Nanak (founder of Sikhism), who challenged Brahmanical authority that reflects Ambedkar's selective approach towards heritage. He respected subversive, equality - minded currents within the Indian tradition (such as Buddhism and the Bhakti movement), while rejecting oppressive currents (such as Manusmriti and caste - supportive rituals). Indeed, on 25 December 1927, Ambedkar famously led the public burning of Manusmriti, the ancient law book which he condemned for sanctifying caste and gender inequalities. By ritually destroying this symbol of Brahmanical heritage, Ambedkar sent a powerful message that no scripture or custom, no matter how old, should be spared if it conflicts with human rights. The same year, he organized the Mahad Satyagraha to assert the right of Dalits to drink water from public tanks, defying caste restrictions. Through such works, Ambedkar exemplified a social reformer's stance towards heritage, Traditions which deny basic equality (such as untouchability) deserve destruction, not preservation (Ambedkar, 1987) .

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Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Footprints Site

Also, Ambedkar did not reject all that was "Indian" or ancient. He drew inspiration from India's rationalist and egalitarian heritage – for example, he admired the ethics of Buddhism and the social humanism of saints such as Kabir and Nanak. His emphasis on rationalism was itself in line with the intellectual heritage of skepticism in India (evoked by the Buddha's critique of ritual or the reformist Brahmo movement, etc.). Ambedkar's educational background in the liberal ideas of the West (he was deeply influenced by the Enlightenment and thinkers like John Dewey) strengthened his scientific temperament. He consistently argued that society "should be based on reason, and not on the cruel traditions of caste".

The French anthropologist Nicolas Jaoul meticulously analyzes the symbolic significance of Ambedkar statues in Uttar Pradesh, shedding light on the complex interplay between Dalit politics, social change, and state dynamics. He states, "Although Ambedkar had warned his admirers (against) making a cult of his personality, a move had started in his home state of Maharashtra even before his death. " Ambedkar's statues are the second largest after Mahatma Gandhi (The Father of the Nation) in the country, and their representations are as diverse as cultural variations across different regions (Lone, 2022) .

In actuality, this entails assessing each procedure to see if it satisfies the standards of justice. Does it preserve human dignity? If not, no amount of antiquity or religious acceptance can redeem it. Thus, culturally and socially, Ambedkar was in favor of progressive reform rather than mere protection. Heritage, in his eyes, was not a museum of rituals to be zealously preserved; It was a legacy that had to be constantly examined, taking into account only those elements that "build a better future society" and discarding those elements that perpetuate injustice.

Constitutional and legal aspects
While Ambedkar challenged social mores through controversy and activism, he also understood that law and constitutional governance were powerful tools for reshaping social norms. As a lawyer and later the first Law Minister of independent India, he worked to translate the principles of equality into concrete legal reforms, even when these reforms impinged on centuries - old traditions. Ambedkar's entire legal philosophy was based on the idea that the state should intervene to eliminate social injustice, rather than passively maintain inherited laws or customs. "The makers of the political constitution must take account of social forces, " he warned, arguing that political democracy could not survive if social inequality remained unchecked (Keer, 1954) . This conviction guided his contributions to both general lawmaking and the design of the Constitution, ensuring that Indian law would promote social revolution and not merely preserve the past.

Ambedkar criticized certain aspects of Islamic personal laws, particularly regarding

Polygamy

Divorce

The status of women

An example of Ambedkar's legal battle with inheritance was the Hindu Code Bill. As Law Minister (1947–51 C. E.), Ambedkar drafted this sweeping legislation to reform Hindu personal law, aimed at outlawing polygamy, giving women equal rights in inheritance and divorce, and generally modernizing family relations. These proposals effectively struck at the patriarchal and caste - based foundations of traditional Hindu law (Sabha, 1946) . Naturally, he faced intense opposition from conservative sections of society and in Parliament, who saw the reforms as an attack on sacred tradition. However, Ambedkar was adamant that the law should uphold gender justice and individual freedom on age - old norms. Frustrated with the stalling of the bill, he resigned from the cabinet in 1951 C. E. when the Hindu Code Bill was shelved, rather than be involved in the defeat of such an important reform. His resignation underlined a point that legal protection of unjust inheritance was unacceptable to him; if the democratic state would not eliminate inequitable customs, he would withdraw from that state apparatus in principled protest. Although enacted only in light pieces after Ambedkar's departure, the Hindu Code reforms he championed ultimately eliminated many discriminatory practices in Hindu law, confirming his belief that India's legal system could not remain prisoner of "personal laws" rooted in older traditions.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (left), as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, presented the final draft of the Indian Constitution to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Speaker of the Constituent Assembly, on 25 November 1949 C. E. . Ambedkar's constitutional vision sought to transform India's legacy by establishing liberty, equality and fraternity as supreme values (Sabha, 1946) .

Ambedkar's greatest legal contribution was undoubtedly the Constitution of India (1950C. E.), which he saw as a means of reshaping Indian society on a rational and egalitarian basis. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, he ensured that the Constitution would break decisively with some of the repressive "legacy" practices. Under Ambedkar's guidance, the Constitution completely abolished "untouchability" in Article 17 – making the practice a punishable offense and thus rejecting an inherent feature of Hindu social heritage. It guaranteed equality before the law and non - discrimination (Articles 14 - 15), regardless of caste, creed or gender, striking at the legal basis of caste hierarchy. It also protected freedom of religion (Article 25) but explicitly gave the state the right to impose social reforms in religious areas – for example, opening temples to all castes – thereby ensuring that "heritage" could not be used as a shield for non - liberal practices. Perhaps most fundamentally, Ambedkar supported affirmative action (reservation) for historically oppressed communities. The Constitution included reservations in legislatures, public employment and education for Scheduled Castes and Tribes as a means of redressing past injustices. Ambedkar saw such measures as the "checks and balances" necessary to ensure that marginalized groups were given a fair share of power. This was a novel idea in the 1950s, drawn not from any Indian precedent but from Ambedkar's own sense of historical wrongs that needed to be corrected. In short, they institutionalized social revolution through law, creating mechanisms for the upliftment of those who had been oppressed by traditional society (Ambedkar, n. d.) .

Communal Award Puna Pact

Ambedkar's imprint on the constitutional text was so profound that scholars have called the Indian Constitution a "social revolutionary statement" and a "modernizing force" since its existence. It replaced "traditional hierarchy and its oppression" with new ideals and institutions designed for liberty, equality, and fraternity. As Granville Austin

observed, the Constitution's provisions on fundamental rights and social justice brought into the mainstream groups that had long been on the margins of society. In Ambedkar's own words during the Constituent Assembly debate, political freedom without social justice would be a mere "contradiction". Equality in politics (one - person - one - vote)

but inequality in social and economic life. He warned that unless this contradiction is resolved, India's democracy will be in danger. This insight led him to rigorously implement egalitarian principles in the Constitution, so that the law could continually push society toward the goals of rational progress and equality, even if social attitudes lagged behind. The Indian Constitution thus became Ambedkar's most important instrument for redefining Indian heritage and it affirmed that constitutional morality – the values of justice enshrined in the Constitution – must trump regressive social mores in guiding the nation. The legal foundations of modern India, which were laid by Ambedkar, clearly prioritize justice over tradition, indicating that any "heritage" practice inconsistent with fundamental rights has no legitimate place in the republic.

Rationalism and selective heritage conservation

There was a consistent rationalist approach behind Ambedkar's approach to both culture and law. He did not reject heritage wholesale; Rather than, they applied a rational criterion to determine which aspects of India's heritage should be preserved and which should be improved or discarded. Ambedkar's selective patronage can be seen in the way he distinguished between social ideals versus social evils in the Indian past. For example, he praised the moral teachings of ancient India when they aligned with universal values. In The Annihilation of Caste, he said that the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity were not alien to Indian soil. He pointed out that the Dhamma of the Buddha and the teachings of the Bhakti saints had embodied such values long before modern democracy.

First day of Constituent Assembly

Thus, Ambedkar tried to reclaim and emphasize the egalitarian aspects of the Indian heritage. He often referred to the Buddhist empire of Emperor Ashoka as a time when social welfare and tolerance were prevalent, and compared it to the post - Manusmriti era. In his writings (such as The Unfinished Revolution and Counter - Revolution in Ancient India), Ambedkar presented Indian history as a battle between Brahmanism and Buddhism a hierarchical system and a revolutionary movement for equality (Indian Cultural Forum, n. d.) . This historical analysis was itself an act of selective reinterpretation were Ambedkar was effectively debating which legacy should be valued. "The history of India is nothing else but the history of the mortal struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism, " he wrote, clearly favoring the Buddhist heritage of compassion and reason. He credited Buddhism with "expelling the evils of Hinduism, including casteism" during the reign of Ashoka, and condemned the Brahmanical counter - revolution (marked by Manusmriti and the violent resurgence of caste power under Pushyamitra Shunga) that wiped out Buddhism in India. By retelling history in this way, Ambedkar celebrated the egalitarian ethics of Buddhism as the true pride of Indian heritage, and condemned the caste - based Brahmanical tradition as a betrayal of that heritage (Mbedkar, 1996) .

Ambedkar's rationalism also meant that he was willing to adopt ideas from global or modern sources if they were beneficial. He did not believe that preserving Indian heritage meant separation. On the contrary, he often said that Indians should learn from the rest of the world to build a better society (for example, he learned liberal constitutional theory from the West, Buddhist philosophy from ancient India, and even ideas from modern science and economics).

Furthermore, Ambedkar's selective approach extended to the realm of identity. Although he staunchly defended the rights of marginalized communities (Dalits, women, religious minorities) and worked to secure their place in the nation, he was wary of romanticizing folk ways that perpetuated alienation or backwardness. He wanted oppressed groups to move forward through education and critical thinking rather than clinging to abusive customs under the guise of cultural identity.

"Educate, agitate, organize" Ambedkar saw education as a means to question one's inherited conditions and gain agency to change them. Thus, in every respect, he placed progressive rationalism above blind patronage. For Ambedkar, traditions had to earn the right to continue, by proving their compatibility with human rights and reason. Those traditions that failed this test, be it caste segregation or patriarchal marriage norms, had to be either reformed or abandoned. In short, Ambedkar's stance was not in itself anti - inheritance; This was an anti - injustice legacy. He believed that the truly proud Indian heritage would be one that was free from caste discrimination, social stagnation and irrational ritualism – a

legacy refined through the sieve of rational, moral enquiry (Verma, 2022) .

Buddhism: An egalitarian alternative to the Brahmanical heritage

Nowhere is Ambedkar's selective preservation of heritage more evident than in his embrace of Buddhism. After decades of struggle to reform Hindu society, Ambedkar concluded that the Brahmanical social system was too detrimental to equality. In 1956, along with millions of his followers, he publicly converted to Buddhism, renouncing Hinduism and its caste - based principles. This transformation was not a decision taken lightly or alone; It was the fruit of Ambedkar's long - held belief that a distinct spiritual - ethical framework was needed to guide Indian society. He clearly presented Buddhism as an indigenous, yet egalitarian, heritage that could serve modern ideals far better than Brahmanical Hinduism. According to Ambedkar, "Buddhism was the best possible alternative. . . because it was an egalitarian religion born in India – not the creation of outsiders. " Unlike Christianity or Islam (which, while egalitarian in principle, were foreign to India and carried the burden of colonialism in the Indian context), Buddhism was entirely Indian and completely compatible with rational humanism. Ambedkar said that the Buddha's teachings emphasized *karuna* (compassion), moral conduct and *prajna* (practical wisdom) without disparities of caste or theism. Thus, conversion to Buddhism allowed Dalits to lay claim to a great Indian heritage (the legacy of Ashoka and Buddha) while rejecting Brahmanical domination (Verma, 2022) .

In Ambedkar's view, this was not just religious conversion – it was a social revolution. He styled his own conversion as a rebirth "Having abandoned my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression, today I am reborn. . . I will not perform [Hindu] *shraddha*. . . I will strictly follow the Eightfold Path of the Buddha. Buddhism is the one true religion and I will live a life guided by the three principles of wisdom, the right path and compassion. ", These words at his *Deekshabhoomi (*Nagpur) conversion ceremony show that Ambedkar saw Buddhism as an antidote to all that was unjust in his former faith. He also made his followers take 22 (Twenty two) vows, many of which explicitly renounced Hindu deities and practices (e. g. vows not to worship Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva, not to believe in the caste system, etc.). This was a direct attempt to free the cultural heritage of the converts from Brahmanical influence, so that a new egalitarian identity could flourish.

Ambedkar's turn towards Buddhism was also informed by his scholarly analysis of Indian history. As mentioned, he considered the ancient conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism to be the decisive conflict that shaped the soul of India. For him Buddhism represented a revolutionary egalitarian morality that challenged caste and priestly authority in ancient times. Its eventual defeat in India (which he called a "counter - revolution" led by conservative Brahmins) was, in Ambedkar's eyes, a tragedy that gave rise to social ills. By reviving Buddhism in the mid - 20th century, Ambedkar aimed to reverse that ancient defeat that was resuming the Buddha's unfinished revolution against caste. At a stroke, this move allowed Dalits to break away from the stigma of "untouchability" (as there are no castes in

Buddhism) and adopt a positive identity linked to a celebrated legacy of enlightenment. Ambedkar, through his book The Buddha and His *Dhamma* (1957 C. E.), formulated a new Buddhist doctrine for his followers, often called *Navayana* (New Vehicle) Buddhism. In it he reinterpreted Buddhist principles in modern, rational terms, removing supernatural elements and highlighting the Buddha's social message. He argued that Buddhist values of social equality, moral community and rational inquiry were the perfect "post - secular" foundation for a modern Indian society seeking to transcend religious fanaticism. Scholars say that Ambedkar saw conversion "not only as a protest against the power structure of caste society, but was also aimed at uprooting the false ideals that had historically distorted and degraded the Dalit self. " In other words, the adoption of Buddhism was a way of freeing the Dalit mind from centuries of Brahmanical ideology and reclaiming agency as full human beings.

Through the promotion of Buddhism, Ambedkar effectively reshaped the Indian heritage. He revered Emperor Ashoka, Gautama Buddha and other figures from Buddhist history as heroes, in contrast to the dominance of Vedic heroes in mainstream stories. It has had a lasting impact. Nowday, the Dalit Buddhist movement continues, and Ambedkarite Buddhists revere sites such as Sarnath and Bodhgaya as part of their proper heritage. Ambedkar's portraits often depict him with a copy of the Constitution in one hand and the Buddhist Dhamma - Chakra (Wheel of Law) in the other – symbolizing in his views the fusion of modern law and ancient Buddhist ethos. It is important to note that Ambedkar's adoption of Buddhism was not a rejection of spirituality, but a strategic and ideological choice to ground Indian identity in a spiritual tradition that affirmed equality. He once remarked that "Buddha gave equality to the slave classes" and that the rise of Buddhism was India's first egalitarian revolution. By associating himself with that revolution, Ambedkar ensured that the future of Indian heritage would include a strong, equality - centered reinterpretation of religion. His Buddhism was, in short, a humanist legacy for India, in contrast to the Brahmanical legacy, which he believed had betrayed India's oppressed peoples.

Ambedkar's legacy in the heritage and identity of modern India

Dr. Ambedkar's ideas have deeply shaped independent India's approach to heritage and collective identity. In the decades since his passing, India has increasingly adopted constitutional values as the nation's guiding force in terms of development that can be traced to Ambedkar's insistence on placing justice above tradition. Modern India's self - image as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic is due to the influence of Ambedkar. The constitutional dimension of heritage that he created means that practices once considered part of India's centuries - old heritage (such as untouchability, sati, child marriage, etc.) are now seen as disgusting aberrations belonging to the past. For example, the principle of non - discrimination is so deeply ingrained in Indian law and discourse today that caste discrimination or exclusion of Dalits is widely condemned and legally punishable – a dramatic change from pre - Ambedkar days when such discrimination was an accepted "legacy". Ambedkar's successful advocacy for Article 17 (abolishing untouchability) and similar provisions redefined Indian

heritage in the eyes of the law. The heritage that India now officially celebrates is a heritage of equality and inclusion, not a heritage of caste. As one jurist put it, Ambedkar "attempted to institutionalize social revolution through law", ensuring that the Constitution would "address historical injustices, challenge systems of discrimination, and advance the cause of emancipation and equality. ", This legacy is evident whenever Indian courts or legislatures strike down a discriminatory practice by citing constitutional morality (for example, the Supreme Court invoked Ambedkarite principles to allow entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala temple, against an age - old tradition). The idea that reform is the duty of the state and that inheritance should be consistent with human rights is now a cornerstone of Indian governance, reflecting the influence of Ambedkar.

Socially, Ambedkar's legacy has been nothing short of transformative for previously marginalized communities. He redefined the identity of Dalits (formerly "untouchables"), instilled in them a sense of pride and created a framework for demanding equality. By challenging the notion that their oppression was an immutable part of Indian culture, Ambedkar empowered millions of people to agitate for change. Dalit movements since the 1950s, whether in the form of political parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party or grassroots activism, have drawn inspiration from his teachings. They often keep Ambedkar's portrait, quote his speeches, and celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti (his birthday) as a festival of liberation. The oppressed have adopted Ambedkarite ideology as part of their cultural identity, sometimes calling themselves "Ambedkarites". Furthermore, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism gave rise to what is now known as the Dalit Buddhist movement. Hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Dalits have followed in his footsteps and converted to Buddhism, claiming an identity that rejects caste hierarchy. The movement not only offers individual spiritual solace but also challenges the broader society to accept its pluralistic heritage. The presence of Neo - Buddhists in India today – with their own monasteries, ceremonies and celebrations such as Dhamma Chakra Pravartana Day (commemorating Ambedkar's conversion) – adds a new layer to India's cultural tapestry, deliberately designed as an egalitarian counter - inheritance to caste Hindu norms.

Nationalist and Architect of Modern India Residence Serve as Memorial, Delhi Sleep for Ever.

The academic and public discourse of modern India also reflects Ambedkar's critical view on heritage. There is a growing trend to re - examine history to highlight the contributions of people buried under traditional narratives. For example, scholars and popular writers now speak with greater appreciation of the Buddhist period and the anti - caste Bhakti saints, which aligns with Ambedkar's historical thesis

that the conflict between caste and equality has been long - running. The government and civil society have also taken steps to memorialize Ambedkar's vision at different important sites of his life (such as his home in London and Mumbai) have been converted into museums, the place of his cremation in Mumbai is now Chaitya Bhoomi – a national monument and the memorial in Nagpur (Deekshabhoomi) where he converted to Buddhism is a major pilgrimage site. These actions demonstrate that modern Indian identity has expanded to include Ambedkarite values. Increasingly, India's heritage is described not only as a legacy of kings and Sanskrit texts, but also as a legacy of movements for social reform, resistance to oppression, and justice. This change is largely due to Ambedkar's legacy. As the editors of The Radical in Ambedkar believe, Ambedkar's work forces us to see the caste question and the Dalit struggle as central to Indian history, not as a side - story. As a result, more Indians today believe that the true measure of our civilizational heritage lies in how inclusive and humane our society becomes a view that Ambedkar championed throughout his life.

It is worth noting that Ambedkar's influence also invites debate on the extent to which traditional norms should be preserved. In contemporary India, tensions sometimes arise between those emphasizing "cultural heritage" and those emphasizing reforms in the Ambedkarite spirit. For example, discussions around the Uniform Civil Code (a single law for all citizens in personal matters) reflect the value of social uniformity and gender justice against the desire to preserve the traditions of different religious communities. Ambedkar himself had long been keen to support a uniform civil code (he included it as a directive principle in the Constitution), reflecting his view that common citizenship should transcend individual group traditions. Although India has not yet enacted a uniform code, the debate continues with Ambedkar's name being repeatedly invoked in favor of reform. Similarly, when incidents of caste violence or discrimination occur today, they are widely condemned as betrayals of "Ambedkar's Constitution". The fact that the Constitution is often referred to as "Ambedkar's Constitution" in public rhetoric underlines how strongly his vision is linked to India's identity as a republic. In fact, Ambedkar is one of the few leaders whose statues adorn almost every city in India, symbolizing the idea of social justice. This reverence is not just a personal tribute; It represents an acknowledgment that the just and equitable India he envisioned is an ideal to which the nation still aspires.

2. Conclusion

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's approach to the preservation of Indian heritage was fundamentally transformative and visionary. Instead of seeing heritage as a passive heritage to be revered in totality, Ambedkar considered it as a dynamic heritage that should be examined, improved and selectively retained. He supported cultural and spiritual elements that advanced human freedom (such as Buddhism and egalitarian folk traditions), and he unhesitatingly rejected those that promoted injustice (such as caste discrimination, untouchability, and patriarchal customs). In the social sphere, he exposed the iniquities of the caste - based system and demanded that India free itself from this "harmful notion" sanctified by tradition. In the legal - constitutional sphere, he established

mechanisms to correct historical wrongs and ensure that independent India would not become a prisoner of its past. Ambedkar's selective approach to heritage conservation can be summarized in his own sermon i. e. societies should "select what is useful and transmit to future generations only that much, and no more". He emphasized that rationality, equality and justice should be the sieve through which we pass our traditions. His life's work – from burning the Manusmriti to writing the Constitution and embracing Buddhism – consistently reflected this philosophy.

Ambedkar's critical perspective on Indian heritage has left an indelible mark on the identity of modern India. Thanks to their efforts, India today stands as a nation that values social justice and inclusion, while also taking pride in its ancient cultures. If India now celebrates Vedic sages as well as figures like Buddha, or if it holds the Constitution as a sacred document above ancient law codes, it is largely due to the Ambedkarite shift in the understanding of heritage. Ambedkar showed that true patriotism is not about romanticizing every ancestral custom, but about building a society where the dignity of each individual is the supreme product of heritage. He often reminded his compatriots that Indians must first be Indians, rising above the divisive identities of caste and creed in favor of a common nationhood based on equality and brotherhood. In this sense, Ambedkar himself has become a legacy figure – a symbol of the radical reformist spirit within Indian civilization. His promotion of **Navayana** Buddhism has given India a new connection with an ancient faith based on modern values of humanism. His constitutional legacy guides India in negotiating the tension between traditional pluralism and contemporary human rights.

Finally, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's approach towards Indian heritage was to preserve its soul by removing its injustices. They retained from the past that which enhanced the human condition and discarded that which degraded it. This approach, once radical, is fast becoming the standard stance of the Indian republic. As India grapples with questions of culture and identity in the 21st century, Ambedkar's voice resonates as a clarion call to remember that no legacy is worth glorifying if it fails the test of justice. His legacy inspires India to create a legacy it can truly be proud of – one defined not by birth stratification, but by the solidarity of a humane society. In the evolving story of Indian heritage, Ambedkar's contributions ensure that equality, rationality and justice remain the ideals and guide the nation towards the higher ideals for which he fought. Community Participation and Common men's heritage should be identified, validate, preserve and promote rather than highlighting royal and religious heritage of India.

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