

# Life and times of *Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar*

A social reformer, a champion of human rights and an emancipator of the downtrodden masses, Dr Ambedkar dedicated his life to awaken the social conscience of modern India

text | Narendra Jadhav



**B**harat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, reverentially called Babasaheb Ambedkar by his followers, was undoubtedly one of the most illustrious sons of India. He entered the socio-political scene in the early 1920s and played a crucial role in the social, cultural, economic and political transformation of India during the closing decades of the British Rule. After India became independent from the British Rule in 1947, Ambedkar was responsible for creating the Constitution for free India. Ambedkar was a great social reformer, a valiant champion of human rights and an emancipator of the downtrodden masses of India, who dedicated all his life to awaken the social conscience of modern India.

Ambedkar's life is an incredible saga: born an untouchable boy, humiliated every step of the way from the childhood to youth, who went on to be at almost impossible odds to secure the highest and most reputable degrees from world class universities – MA and PhD from Columbia University, USA, and DSc from the London School of Economics besides Bar-at-Law degree from London. He then returned to India and devoted his life to the destruction





**Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set in the preamble of the Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion denies them**

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar

of the caste-ridden old order, characterised by injustice and denial of human rights. Without being favoured either by family fortune or political lineage, but by the sheer grit of his will and backbreaking hard work, supreme courage and selfless sacrifice, he overcame bitter political opposition and perils of caste discrimination to become the principal architect of the Constitution of Independent India. He then proceeded to build the safeguards of affirmative action for establishing a more equitable society that is capable of delivering social justice to millions of downtrodden, thus heralding in India a new age of social equality and rationalism. In this process, Ambedkar came to the forefront not only as a valiant upholder of the Indian Republic but also emerged as the touchstone for the conscience of modern India.

Most statues of Dr Ambedkar in the country depict a stocky man, invariably dressed in a blue suit and red tie, holding a book under his arm which, of course, represents the Constitution of India. Such statues can be found everywhere in India, in villages and in cities, usually at crossroads. Every year, on December 6 (the death anniversary of Ambedkar), around two million Ambedkarites throng Chaitya Bhoomi in Mumbai to pay homage to the hero they worship as their saviour. It is also not surprising

that Ambedkar was voted, in August 2012, as the “Greatest Indian after Gandhi” in an e-poll initiated by some TV channels with an overwhelming majority of votes.

In the light of these facts, it is grossly unfair to characterise Ambedkar simply as a leader of the Untouchables or Dalits as is often done even in otherwise responsible quarters. Ambedkar was not simply a leader of Untouchables, not even only a leader of the oppressed people of India. He was a national leader. His erudition,

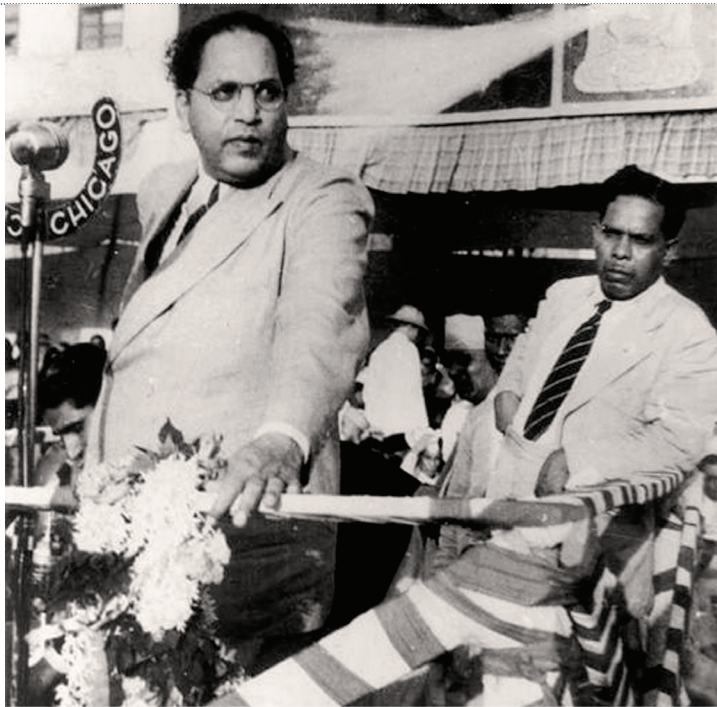
his mass movements and his role in the government and outside clearly show that he was a patriot of a sterling order.

In the course of his most eventful life, Ambedkar made outstanding contributions as a scholar, educationist, journalist, as an authority on Comparative

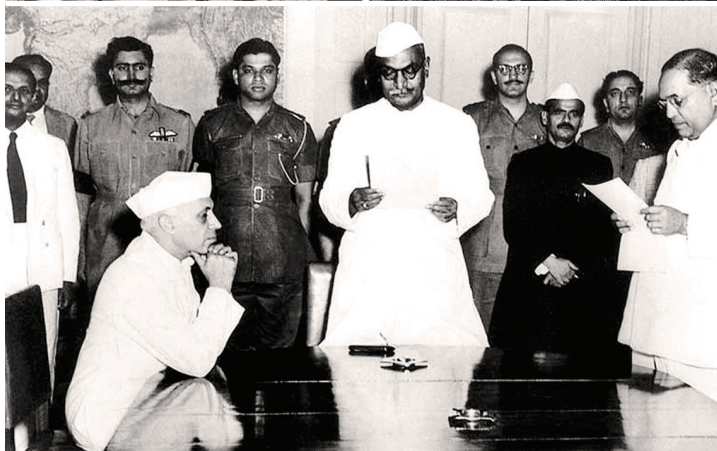
Religion, as a policy-maker and administrator, and as a parliamentarian, besides being a jurist who became the principal architect of the Indian Constitution.

In spite of being a statesman and a mass leader, Ambedkar always remained a reflective thinker and erudite scholar. He was also a prolific writer. Perhaps no other mass leader in India has produced anywhere close to the voluminous writings that he did. The sheer volume is astonishing even for a full-time

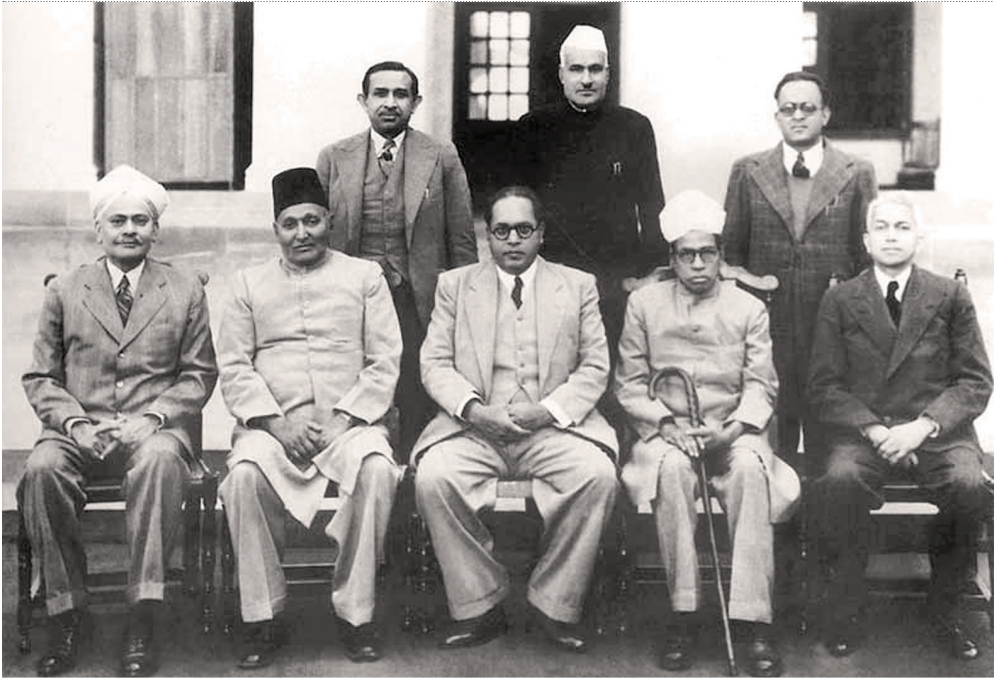
*Dr Ambedkar ensured a greater number of seats for the untouchables in the Poona Pact*



Google search trends reflect Dr Ambedkar's timeless relevance and popularity and shows him to be the third most searched historic Indian personality after Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. In terms of search interest from within India, queries on Babasaheb continue to gain significant search interest from Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Puducherry, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan and Karnataka



TRIBUTE



Dr Ambedkar had a penchant for reading and writing. He had penned a number of books that dealt with myriad topics ranging from politics to Buddhism, from caste to gender discrimination. Some of his major writings are *Essay on Untouchable and Untouchability*, *Buddha And Karl Marx*, *Who Were Shudras?*, *Philosophy of Hinduism* and more. He died on December 6, 1956, while working on his latest book, *The Buddha and his Dharma*, which was published after his death.





**Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules, it ceases to be a religion as it kills responsibility which is an essence of the true religious act**

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar

scholar: 22 books and monographs completed and published plus 10 books left behind incomplete at various stages, 10 research papers, articles and book reviews besides hundreds of articles in Marathi in various fortnightly newspapers.

The range in Ambedkar's works is also equally amazing. On politics: 11 books and monographs including treatises such as *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1940), *What Gandhi and Congress Have Done To Untouchables* (1945); the classics such as *Federation versus Freedom* (1939), *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah* (1943); *States and Minorities* (1947) and *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (1955); on economics two pathbreaking treatises – *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* (1917) and *The Problem of The Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution* (1925); on sociology – a timeless contribution such as *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) besides a remarkable essay on *Castes in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development* (1918); on anthropology – two provocatively original treatises – *Who Were the Shudras* (1946) and *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables* (1948) and

finally on religion – *Magnum Opus: Buddha and His Dhamma*.

Ambedkar also delivered a very large number of speeches – 537 speeches, to be precise, on a wide range of subjects and at diverse regional, national and international fora. Among the subjects, the speeches ranged from social, economic and religious issues to those relating to law and Constitution, besides political. The forums included the Bombay Province Legislative Council, (and later) Bombay Legislative Assembly, Round Table Conferences hosted by the British government in London in the role as a Labour Member of Viceroy's Executive Council, Central Legislative Assembly (as the first Law Minister of Independent India),

**The Central Government is planning to observe Dr Ambedkar's birthday as National Nandhutva Samrasara Diwas**

Constituent Assembly (as the Chairman, Drafting Committee for the Constitution of India) and the Parliament (Opposition Member, Rajya Sabha). In addition, Ambedkar gave a large number of public addresses as the most prominent leader of the social and political movement inspired by him.

Extracts from the book *Ambedkar, An Economist Extraordinaire* by Narendra Jadhav



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