

Connotation of Ambedkar's Vision of Social Inclusion in India under the Hindutva-Inspired Modi Regime

Dr. Mukesh Kumar Khatwani¹, Prof. Dr. Ishrat Afshan Abbasi², Dr. Arfan Mahmood³

¹ Associate Professor at the Area Study Centre, Far East and Southeast Asia University of Sindh, Jamshoro. E-mail: mukesh.khatwani@usindh.edu.pk

² Professor & Chairperson, Department of International Relations, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. E-mail: iafshan.abbasi@usindh.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. E-mail: arfanmahmood.csas@pu.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63163/jpehss.v4i1.1689>

Abstract

Ambedkar's vision of an inclusive society, which was based on the ideas of social justice, constitutional democracy, and the complete abolition of the caste system, has gained greater relevance and significance because it sought to establish an egalitarian society by eliminating all forms of oppressive hierarchies, including Hindu nationalism (Hindutva), through social reforms and the legal empowerment of all marginalized communities. Modi's contemporary Hindutva poses substantive dangers not only to Indian democracy and the pluralism of Indian society but also has greater implications for regional peace and security. Keeping in mind the Modi regime's policies and the contemporary socio-political landscape, marked by increasing populism and identity politics, the paper highlights the importance of Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion as a counter strategy to Hindu nationalism because Ambedkar's inclusivity is extended to all segments of society and treats the individual as the basic unit of society regardless of religious, race, gender, or caste identity. The paper concluded that in the present political landscape, Ambedkar's vision acts as a framework for policymakers and activists endeavouring to establish a more inclusive political environment that acknowledges and responds to the varied needs of all citizens.

Keywords: Hindutva, Hindu Nationalism, Social Inclusion, Egalitarian Society, Cultural Diversity, Peace, and Security

Introduction

In 2015, UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is based on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 interrelated global objectives designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" (Cano-Hila, 2022), prominently incorporate the ethos of social inclusion. According to UNESCO, 'Social inclusion refers to the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of individuals to participate fully in society. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all people, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to social, economic, and cultural resources. This concept is crucial in promoting equity and community cohesion. Thus, by focusing on inclusivity in education, SDG 4 inherently supports the broader mission of social inclusion.

No doubt, progress has been made on these 17 SDGs, and many countries, including developing ones, have taken the initiative to promote inclusion, yet social exclusion persists in both developed and developing countries. Social inclusion and equity are fundamental to fostering a just and progressive society. In India, systemic inequalities based on caste, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location are not only witnessed at the societal level, but they are hindering access to higher education and employment opportunities (Swati, 2025). Since the 1970s, the Government of India acknowledging disadvantaged communities, adopted policy strategies like, the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for Scheduled Tribes, the Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes (SCP for SCs), Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for Minorities, and Gender Responsive Budgeting, however, still vulnerable section of India such as, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious minorities, have lagged behind others in terms of several development indicators because of the unequal social structures, caste based discrimination, and rising Hindu nationalism. By reviewing current policy initiatives and research literature on Hinduization¹ or Hindutva under the Modi regime, this paper highlights the significance and relevance of Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion or inclusivity to foster a just and progressive society. Modi regime policies of systematic exclusion and marginalisation of scheduled castes/tribes, adiwasi, Muslims, and Christians have made India a fascist state instead of a secular democracy. No doubt, the promotion of Ambedkar's philosophy of social inclusion has become essential for building equitable and resilient communities, particularly for those affected by individual and structural adversity such as Hindu nationalism and majority authoritarianism in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society like India.

Reviewing the literature on social inclusion and exclusion and rising Hindu nationalism in India, the paper aims to critically examine Ambedkar's concept of social inclusion for fostering a just society. The paper concludes that the importance of Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion works as a counter-strategy to Hindu nationalism because Ambedkar's inclusivity is extended to all segments of society and treats the individual as the basic unit of society regardless of religious, racial, gender, or caste identity. The paper also concluded that in the present political landscape, Ambedkar's vision acts as a framework for policymakers and activists endeavouring to establish a more inclusive political environment that acknowledges and responds to the varied needs of all citizens.

Social Inclusion/Exclusion Debate

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, architect of the Indian Constitution, addressing the issues of caste- and work-based discrimination and untouchables (Dalit) introduced the terms 'social inclusion and exclusion' long before these concepts became part of standard academic discourse in the late 1970s. Ambedkar not only analysed systemic caste-based discrimination/marginalisation of Dalit communities but also presented a strategic framework that addressed how specific communities are systematically and deliberately excluded from social, political, and economic life by formulating constitutional tools to reverse this inhuman process of suppression. Later on, the concept was witnessed in policy discourse in France in 1970 and also adopted by the European Union in the 1980s as the replacement of poverty (Aasland and Flotten 2000;

Rawal, 2008). After the World Summit, the concept was widely used by researchers in the field of development studies (Jackson, 1999). Silver (1994) has argued that the meaning of social exclusion depends on the nature of the society, or the dominant model of the society from which exclusion occurs, and it varies in meaning according to national and ideological contexts. The concept of social exclusion is a vogue because of its various meanings and interpretations in different societies; for instance, in Europe there is classism while in the subcontinent it is casteism (Aasland and Flotten, 2000).

¹ Hinduization is a process of social ordering according to the Hindu framework, which is typically based on a hierarchy of caste.

The concepts of social inclusion and exclusion are inseparably connected. Therefore, whenever we talk about the promotion of social inclusion, we have to understand social exclusion and social discrimination. According to Francis (2002), ‘Social exclusion is the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live’ (Francis, 2002). Social exclusion refers to a situation of economic or social disadvantage. Social inclusion is about addressing the issues that result in social exclusion, so it is often used to describe the opposite effect of social exclusion. Social inclusion happens when positive action is taken to change the circumstances that lead to social exclusion. Promoting social inclusion involves building inclusive societies that offer equal opportunities regardless of circumstances. Thus, social inclusion is the process through which societies ensure access to opportunities and resources so that all individuals, regardless of background or status, can achieve their potential, participate fully in the economic, social, and political realms, and have a voice in decisions that affect them.

The ethnic groups, the Madhes and Dalits, have now challenged what they call the Hindu hegemony, which, according to them, has relegated them to the margins. It would be wrong to treat the issue of exclusion in a simplistic manner or understand it through the binary opposition of exclusion/inclusion. Thus, the issue must be discussed and debated by identifying the variations amongst the social sub-categories within the caste and ethnic population (Rawal, 2008).

Social Inclusion Frameworks

Various researchers have developed frameworks to combat social exclusion and make modern society more inclusive and just. Some of them target specific groups such as people with disabilities (Koller, Pouesard, Rummens, 2018; Cobigo, Brown, Lachapelle, Lysaght, Martin, and Ouellette-Kuntz, 2016), immigrants (Beretta, Sayyad, and Bruce 2028; Fangen, 2010) and people with dementia (Pinkert, Köhler, Von-Kutzleben, Hochgräber, Cavazzini C, and Völz, 2014), while others focus on various fields such as education (Affo & Gunter, 2008; Juvonen & Lessard, 2019), health care (Coombs, Nicholas & Pirkis, 2013; O'Donnell, O'Donovan & Elmusharaf 2018) and technologies (Pérez-Escolar & Canet 2023; Mervyn, Simon & Allen, 2014). In comparison to these frameworks, a framework based on a systematic review on current social inclusion measures, developed by Hassan et al (2022), is more robust as it contributes to identifying eight factors that contribute to social inclusion; these are presented in a below figure:

The above-mentioned frameworks were developed based on research on a particular group or field in specific settings; thus, they do not help in understanding and addressing the issue of inclusion or exclusion deeply rooted in religion and the caste system (based on the law of Manu Smriti), particularly in the Indian sub-continent. Dr. Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion is developed in the context of the Indian sub-continent; hence, it systematically addresses the root causes of social exclusion and discrimination that are embodied in religious scripts, which were systematically transmitted into the caste system (pure/sacred castes and impure/untouchables castes) by the then dominant religious-political elites.



Ambedkar's Vision of Social Inclusion

Indian society is multi-ethnic (more than 2000 ethnic groups) and culturally and linguistically diverse society, where more than 120 major languages are spoken while Eighth Schedule of constitution officially recognize 22 languages (such as Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, and Urdu). Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu). Dr Ambedkar, as a visionary and eminent social jurist, systematically took up the issue of exclusion at multi-fold fronts, such as legal and constitutional, political, economic, social, and cultural, for establishing an egalitarian society. Realizing the importance of cohesion and social harmony among various ethnic groups and tribes in India, Ambedkar emphasized social inclusion and can enjoy an inclusive society where every citizen equal rights and privileges regardless of religion, caste, ethnicity, and gender. Ambedkar's framework of social inclusion, or an inclusive society based on social justice and equality, dismantles oppressive and hegemonic hierarchies.



Annihilation of Caste: The caste system can be witnessed in Vedic times and was promoted by the Law of Manu (Manu Smriti) to become a more complex and rigid system of social stratification, based on birth and occupation; a person's status is determined by his/her caste instead of merit and capabilities. Dr Ambedkar, belonging to a Mahar Community (considered to be untouchable), faced discrimination and humiliation and resolved to fight against this social evil. To him, “caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or align off barbed wires which prevents Hindus from comingling and which has therefore to be pulled down. Caste is a Notion; it is a state of mind.” Ambedkar considers the caste system not simply a social hierarchy but a framework that sustained inequity and deprived individuals of fundamental human rights.

Constitutional Morality: Central to Ambedkar's vision was the conviction that social inclusion must be grounded in constitutional protection. Ambedkar, understanding the social exclusion's cultural and religious legacies, addressed it on the legal front. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution ensured constitutional provisions by providing articles such as 15, which forbids discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, and 17 eradicates untouchability in all manifestations. These provisions exemplify Ambedkar's dedication to establishing a legal system that safeguards the dignity and rights of all individuals, especially those from marginalised communities. In modern India, the significance of these constitutional protections is paramount, particularly while caste-based discrimination and violence endure with rising Hindu nationalist identity.

Economic Justice: Economic justice, one of the fundamental elements of social inclusion and social justice as identified and advocated by Dr. Ambedkar, is relevant in modern societies in general and Indian Society in particular. Economic inequalities not only underpin social isolation of marginalised communities but are also considered as ‘root cause of all social evils’. Raising his voice against the suppression and exclusion of untouchables, scheduled castes, and religious minorities in India, Dr. Ambedkar's agenda included efforts like land reforms, labour rights, and educational opportunities, all intended to elevate the economically underprivileged. His conviction that economic empowerment is vital for social inclusion highlights the necessity for policies that tackle systemic economic disparities,

ensuring access to resources and opportunities for individuals historically marginalised from the economic mainstream.

Education and Employment: Belonging to scheduled castes and facing caste-based discrimination, Ambedkar considered education as a weapon of emancipation and liberation from social exclusion and discrimination. His popular slogan ‘Educate, Agitate, Organise’ reflects how he was convinced that education, as a potent instrument for personal and societal transformation, can liberate these marginalised communities from the constraints of ignorance and poverty. He believed that access to quality education was not just a privilege but a fundamental right that should be accessible to everyone, especially marginalised populations. Ambedkar's vision of employing education as a catalyst for social transformation is particularly pertinent today, as it underscores the necessity for fair access to education and the significance of a curriculum that fosters principles of equality, justice, and critical thinking.

Rising Hindu Nationalism/ Hindutva Under Modi Regime

Hindutva is not a new phenomenon; it was conceptualized by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923, who was a prominent and controversial figure in India's independence movement and the principal ideologue behind Hindutva. He coined the term in his 1923 pamphlet “*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*” (Babar, 2023), where he defined a Hindu as someone who considers India both their "fatherland" and "holy land," thereby excluding Muslims and Christians from this national identity.

Since the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, the political landscape and dynamics of governance have been polarized, and the essence of a secular and inclusive society has been altered into a Hindu nationalist agenda that aligns with Hindutva ideology (Biswas, 2020). The complicated multi-ethnic and religious composition of India has been threatened by the rising Hindu-centric national identity, rooted in Brahminism and Hindutva. The Hindu identity is redefined under the notion of Hinduism or Hindutva by the Brahminical political elite to re-establish and maintain their traditional caste privileges within a modern institutional context. Hindutva, thus, represents the upper-caste Hindu elite with their entrenched socio-cultural capital, manoeuvring to shape mass politics in a manner that perpetuates their historical domination (Baru, 2021). Hindutva's core ideology, based on Brahmanic supremacy, believes in the aggressive projection of Akhand Bharat (Expansionism) and excludes Muslims, Christians, Dalits, Pasmanda, and Adivasis—labelling them as threats to national purity. According to Hindutva ideology, the territory of Hindus encompasses the entire Indian subcontinent, referred to as ‘*Akhand Bharat*’ (undivided India) (Babar, 2023).

The BJP not only embraced this ideology but, during the 1996 Lok Sabha election, pledged support to Hindutva in its political manifesto (Flåten, 2016). Modi, aligning with the RSS vision of Hindu majoritarianism, promoted Hindutva as a defining national ideology through his speeches such as *Mujhe Ganga Maiyya ne bulaya hai*”, “*Unke liye Ganga ek nadi hai mere liye Ganga Maa Hai*”, ‘I am Hindu Nationalist, and will do the same with people who will support Pakistan.’ BJP's instrumental groups promoting Hindutva, such as Bharatiya Hindu Parivar (BHP), Sangh Parivar, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925, and its groups such as the Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, are crucial to understanding the dynamics of Hindutva and its dream of Akhand Bharat (Babar, 2023). Modi regime has also systematically and strategically promoted Hindutva through legal instruments such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exacerbates communal polarisation in Assam, rendering Muslim minority populations stateless; the revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir; Brahminization of academia, education, and public discourse; and Weaponization of media and surveillance against minorities. Hindutva fuels Islamophobia, affecting diplomatic relations not only with Pakistan but also with Bangladesh, the Maldives, and even Gulf countries. Increasing border tensions with China (e.g., Doklam, Galwan Valley) indicate an assertive and confrontational Indian foreign policy, influenced by the ideology of Hindutva.

Since the BJP's rise to power, India has adopted an aggressive and violent attitude that has not only raised concerns regarding minorities' rights in India, affecting Kashmiris, but also raised security challenges for regional peace. More recently, in blatant violation of international law, India violated the sovereignty of Pakistan by attacking places of worship and the civilian population inside Pakistan. Indian aggression against Pakistan not only resulted in a War between Pakistan and India, but it has also raised the risk of a nuclear war in South Asia. So Modi's Hindutva has resulted in volatile peace in the region, which has jeopardized the peace and security of the region and beyond. Thus, Modi's policy to promote Hindu nationalist identity contradicts India's constitutional secularism and democratic foundations established by visionary Leaders like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Nehru, and Azad (Ganguly, 2023) and poses substantive threats not only to Indian democracy and pluralistic society as advocated by Dr. Ambedkar but also to the regional peace and security beyond South Asia. India's future trajectory will be determined by how its leaders, political activists, and institutions respond to the rising religious identity politics and take steps to safeguard Ambedkar's vision of an inclusive society as ensured in the Indian Constitution.

Social Inclusion vs Hindutava

Key points of comparison	Ambedkar's social inclusion	Hindutva (Modi/BJP)
Core Philosophy	A substantive and right based, aiming to empower every marginalised individual against any form of oppression	Hindu identity-based integration, aiming to build a cohesive national front by emphasising shared Hindu civilization and heritage
Central Goal	Annihilation of caste and promoting social equality	Consolidated Hindu-centric identity
Government	Secular/social democracy	Majority Authoritarian
Social Structure	Egalitarian and casteless	Unified Hindu Majority
Religious Scope	Secular/Rejection of hierarchy and Protection of all religions equally	Hinduism based on Caste hierarchy
Minority Rights	Constitutional safeguards	Often viewed as "outsiders" to the cultural nation
Primary Unit	Individual	The Hindu community

Conclusion

BJP, having strong affiliation with RSS, has always advocated for 'the Hindu (upper castes) and seen minority groups as outsiders. BJP has systematically and strategically taken policy and legislative measures to absorb lower castes into a monolithic Hindu identity to build a majoritarian voting bloc, a 'Hindu-centric majority authoritarian'. BJP's policies have not only threatened the multi-ethnic and pluralistic Indian society, but posed threats to regional peace and security. Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion directly contradicts the majoritarian, cultural nationalism of the modern Hindutva movement and promotes inclusion through the lens of constitutional morality, annihilation of caste, and equal citizenship. The paper highlights the importance of Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion as a counter strategy to Hindu nationalism because Ambedkar's inclusivity is extended to all segments of society and treats the individual as the basic unit of society regardless of religious, racial, gender, or caste identity. The paper concluded that in the present political landscape of contemporary India, Ambedkar's vision acts as a framework for policymakers and political activists endeavouring to

establish a more inclusive political environment that acknowledges and responds to the varied needs of all citizens. Thus, the paper concludes that the contemporary political landscape of India requires the promotion of Ambedkar's vision of social inclusion to build and strengthen the secular, democratic egalitarian society where every citizen has equal rights and status regardless of religion, caste, class and gender,

References

- Aasland, A. & Fløtten, T. (2001). Ethnicity and Social Exclusion in Estonia and Latvia, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53 (7), 023-1049.
- Babar, S. (2023). Hindu and Hindutva Ideology in Indian Polity, *Strategic Studies*, 43(2), 80-96.
- Baru, S. (2021). *India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and Cu: Caste, Class and Cultural Revolution*. Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin Books India.
- Biswas, S. (2020, Dec. 2). The Secret behind Success of India's Ruling Party BJP, *BBC News*, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55049627> (Accessed: May 5, 2026)
- Beretta, P., Sayyad A.E., & Bruce, C. (2018). Immigrants' information experiences: an informed social inclusion framework, *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 67(4), 373-393.
- Cobigo, V., Brown, R., Lachapelle, Y., Lysaght, R., Martin, L., Ouellette-Kuntz, H., & Fulford, C. (2016). Social inclusion: A proposed framework to inform policy and service outcomes evaluation. *Inclusion*, 4(4), 226-238.
- Cano-Hila, A. B. (2022). Understanding social inclusion in contemporary society: Challenges, reflections, limitations, and proposals. *Social Inclusion*, 10(2), 1-5.
- Coombs, T., Nicholas, A., & Pirkis, J. (2013). A review of social inclusion measures. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 47(10), 906-919. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867413491161> PMID: 23737598
- Fangen, K. (2010). Social exclusion and inclusion of young immigrants: Presentation of an analytical framework. *Young*, 18(2), 133-156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/110330881001800202>
- Flåten, L. T. (2016). *Hindu nationalism, history and identity in India: Narrating a Hindu past under the BJP*. Routledge. n
- Ganguly, S. (2023). The Great Fight over India's Myths. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/15/india-nehru-history-myths-modi-bjp-politics-review/> (Accessed May 5, 2026).
- Hassan, Z., Khreich, W., & Osman, I. H. (2022). An international social inclusion index with application in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development countries. *Decision Analytics Journal*, 3, 100047.
- Jackson, C. (1999). Social Exclusion and Gender: Does One Size Fit All?, *The European Journal of Development Research* 11(1), 125-146
- Juvonen, Lessard, Rastogi, Schacter and Smith (2019). Promoting social inclusion in educational settings: challenges and opportunities. *Educ Psychol.* 54(4), 250-270.
- Koller, D., Pouesard, M. L., & Rummens, J. A. (2018). Defining social inclusion for children with disabilities: A critical literature review. *Children & Society*, 32(1), 1-13.
- Mervyn, Simon A, Allen DK (2014). Digital inclusion and social inclusion: a tale of two cities. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(9):1086-104.
- O'Donnell, P., O'Donovan, D., & Elmusharaf, K. (2018). Measuring social exclusion in healthcare settings: a scoping review. *International journal for equity in health*, 17(1), 15.
- Pradhan, R. (2006). Understanding Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion in Nepalese Context: Some Preliminary Remarks, *The Organisation* 9 (3), i-xi

- Pérez-Escolar, M., & Canet, F. (2023). Research on vulnerable people and digital inclusion: toward a consolidated taxonomical framework. *Universal access in the information society*, 22(3), 1059-1072.
- Pandey, A. (2021). Relevance of Ambedkar's vision on social inclusion in contemporary time. *Available at SSRN 5007383*.
- Pinkert, C., Köhler, K., von Kutzleben, M., Hochgräber, I., Cavazzini, C., Völz, S., & Holle, B. (2021). Social inclusion of people with dementia—an integrative review of theoretical frameworks, methods and findings in empirical studies. *Ageing & Society*, 41(4), 773-793.
- Raffo, C., & Gunter, H. (2008). Leading schools to promote social inclusion: developing a conceptual framework for analysing research, policy and practice. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(4), 397-414.
- Rawal, N. (2008). Social inclusion and exclusion: A review. *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 2, 161-180.)
- Reddy, C. R. M. (2018). Ambedkar's views on democracy and political vision in reality, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 79(4), 1449-1455.
- Sarin. N. (2021). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: An architect of modern inclusive society, *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 3(2), 112-113
- Silver, H. (1994). Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms in *International Labour Review*, 133 (5-6), 531– 578.
- Swati. N. (2025). Social Inclusion and Equity in India: An Analysis of National Education Policy 2020 with a Focus on Higher Education in Uttarakhand. 10.13140/RG.2.2.31476.46726.