

Realising Ambedkar's ideologies through advancement in IT services

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Abstract

The Father of the Indian Constitution, Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar, worked tirelessly to eradicate deep rooted social and economic discrimination and evils like the caste system and gender inequality in India. For long it has been thought that Ambedkar's ideologies can only be achieved by social means such as policy making, legal formulation and education, but that modern engineering and internet technologies have tremendous power in realising Ambedkar's ideologies is becoming more evident with the IT revolution in India. This paper brings to light how engineering marvels like internet services can accelerate India towards Ambedkar's ideology.

Keywords: *Dr BR Ambedkar, information technology, internet, e-governance, economic progress, equality, liberty.*

I. Introduction

The adoption of information technology (IT) based technology is not new in India. During 1976 - 1996, the Government of India initiated digitisation of documents via the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to provide efficient and sustainable processing of files (or data) in departments of finance, commercial taxations, excise, public distributions, etc [1, 2]. However, this early initiative focussed on digitisation of documents rather than e-governance – digitisation of government services to the people. Although e-governance was initiated in the late 1990s, in more recent times, the Indian governments are focussing on electronically empowering all people by promulgating the use of smartphones for availing internet based services [3, 4]. IT based technologies which includes the concept of mobile applications and cashless transactions have emerged as the catalysts for economic growth and citizen empowerment in the recent decade. Undercurrent, this initiative can steadily realise Ambedkar's India — a land of equality, liberty and equal opportunity. This paper presents how technology can fulfil Ambedkar's ideology and aid in overall human advancement.

II. Ambedkar's vision of India

Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. He was born on 14th April, 1891 at Mhow, near Indore to Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. Bhimrao Ambedkar was a multi-talented person. He was a prolific student, a reputed scholar, economist, lawyer, professor, politician, social activist, author, and a barrister. Though he hailed from a socially backward caste, he rose to unparalleled height and framed the constitution of India. He is termed as the father of the Constitution of India. However the life of Ambedkar was marked by struggles [5, 6]. Since he was a dalit, he was not given equal opportunities. During his growing years, he encountered many challenges and social discrimination. Teachers and other students treated Bhimrao Ambedkar with inferiority. Nevertheless he proved that every hurdle in life can be surmounted with talent and firm determination. He lent his voice to the suppressed and backward community. He made a determined and relentless fight against the social evil practices like the caste system, and promoted education to all and upliftment to the untouchables. He rose to unparalleled fame owing to his ideologies and contributions to the social and economic advancement of India. He has been voted as the Greatest Indian to have ever lived in a poll with more than two crore votes [7]. He passed away on December 6, 1956 and was posthumously conferred with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in 1990. The Indian governments have tried best to advance the ideologies and principles of Ambedkar of liberty, equality and fraternity by social and economic policies and regulations but little progress has been made in this aspect. In the sequel, we discuss how the advent of the information technology revolution and web based services can achieve what social reforms could not in achieving Ambedkar's ideologies.

III. India's move towards IT services

Of all the societal transformations that have in many ways changed the face of humanity, the one transformation that is permeating the world today is the paradigm shift from manual to automated technology. The promulgation of smartphones and internet usage for daily services and a vociferous government led digitisation (electronic availability of information) and digitalisation (electronic availability of all services) movements has seen a surge in the number of citizens who reap the benefits of digitalisation. There are more than 60 crore internet users

from urban and 35 crore rural areas and India has seen a surge of more than 45% in internet users since 2019; there is a 54% increase in the use of smartphones from 2010 to 2020 [8].

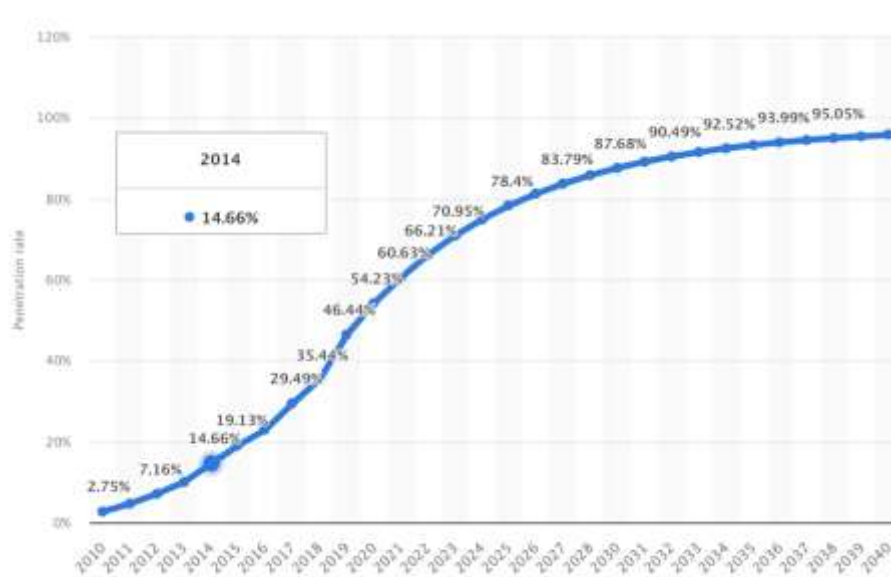


Figure 1: Percentage increase of smartphones in the Indian market with projection until 2040.

Almost all services which were once done manually by humans are now accomplished by IT services using smartphones and internet; thus the electronic divide between people and governance is being reduced. Internet based services now encompasses every domain of life including financial transactions, infrastructure, education, agriculture, etc. What is more worthwhile is that becoming IT dependable has made governance of governments seamless, transparent and far reaching to every nook and corner of the country. The biggest impact of this is the reduction in the social and economic divide. Internet based services can eradicate discrimination. The rich and the poor, the outcasts and the upper castes all have equal access to all services. This provision is inline with realising the vision of Ambedkar.

IV. Fulfilment of Ambedkar's vision through IT services

“Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise both will wither and die.”

Babasaheb Ambedkar

Ambedkar promoted advancement of thought. Since independence, it has been thought that the social and economic policy framework is the biggest propeller to foster Ambedkar's vision of India. However the promulgation of smartphones and internet services to all people could achieve Ambedkar's vision more swiftly. In 1950, the newly independent India officially abolished its caste system and outlawed discrimination against the dalits who had been attached as a the lowest sect of social hierarchy [9]. But India's caste system buttressed by 3000 years of history has proved highly resilient to this change. Ambedkar advocated abolishing the caste system. Even after seven decades of government interference, caste system continues to pervade every aspect of Indian life with dalits facing deep rooted socio-economic discrimination that impedes their advancement in better living standards.

IV. A. Cashless transactions

Although it is arguable that the disparity in access to credit is tied to differences in income, assets or education, the evidence suggests otherwise. Dalits are even now subjected to humiliation and bullied in rural areas. Banks have discriminated systematically against lower castes. Loan applications from dalits are discouraged, additional sureties are demanded and small loans are issued and high collaterals are required. Dalits have long been subjected to long waiting periods are queues in banks, pension offices, shops, railway stations, etc. The advent of cashless transactions, online bookings, pay n go contactless methods, online delivery of goods, etc. the need to physically go and purchase has been nullified [10]. Discrimination has always been at its peak in the delivery of government schemes. The political, religious, caste and economic disparities led to unequal disbursement of government money to people thus causing the poor-rich divide. People were discriminated against and ripped off their benefits so inhumanely that it caused the poor to die of starvation and hunger. The biggest gain from making all services electronically available through the internet is that the government monetary benefits are being directly credited into the accounts of the citizens [11]. This has removed any scope for discrimination. Moreover the scope for corruption has been eliminated as now there is no scope

to show partiality or undue favouritism at the panchayat level during disbursement of funds. Most corruption within cash flows happen during the sale and purchase of properties; this leads to a lot of unaccounted wealth generation; going web-based has caused all services to be rendered in a free and fair manner with equal opportunity and accountability to all people to make their cash flows without any human intervention. Going cashless gives great accountability to every penny spent by every individual. This has drastically reduced the scope for the proliferation of unaccounted (black) money. Ambedkar advocated the need for stringent taxation measures. The online mode of all transactions, including salaries and purchases, allows the government to monitor the cash flows both at the national level and at the individual level and account each individual/company for the taxes they are due. For instance, the influx of IT based taxation services has led to India's gross revenue collection to a record high of Rs 27.07 lakh crore rupees in FY22, while the tax-to-GDP ratio jumped to an over two-decade high of 11.7 percent [12].

Bringing internet based transactions close to the people has increased the buying capacity of people thus contributing to the overall economic development of India. The recent Make-In-India campaign with a digital face (online applications, approvals, transactions, taxations, etc.) has become a great success in that the poor and the downtrodden, especially those classes of people that have been subjected to immense discrimination, have gone to become job providers.

The internet has the power to move India from discrimination to equality. Seamless and cashless flow of money, firm and well monitored taxation system, transactions with less or no scope for corruption and discrimination — this is certainly what Ambedkar envisioned for India.

IV. B. Education

“So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you.”

Babasaheb Ambedkar

Ambedkar's social liberty and advancement is now being realised through online education initiatives in India. The advancement of online learning, online availability of textbooks and study resources has allowed people of all sects, boys and girls, including dalits to access the highest quality education. Dalit children were subjected to extreme discrimination in schools.

Girls were not even sent to school. Poor students were not allowed high quality education due to the high fees involved. Today the influx of internet and the digitisation of study material and the promulgation of internet services helped these dalits and girls and all citizens of India get access to all text books and study material and listen to high quality lectures from reputed professors who belong to the said upper classes [11, 13]. Online education initiatives have eliminated the caste divide that was once the most prevalent form of social evil in India. The boundaries of time, location, caste, gender and income are abolished. Hostel life marks a wonderful time for every student and leaves him with memories and friendships that stay for a lifetime. The Indian caste system is so rooted in so much that almost all universities including the Indian Institutes of Technology provide separate hostels and canteens for dalits. This only imposes and fuels social divide among students. India has recently found a one-stop solution to end all forms of discrimination in the education sector using internet based education; The Government of India in its Union Budget of 2022 has announced the formation of a Digital University [14] - where all resources are available online. This straightforwardly eliminates any discrimination of any form among students as all resources will be a click away to all the students.

IV. C. Health

People have been subjected to discrimination in medical deployment since ages in India. This discrimination is based on caste, gender and economic status. Dalits were not allowed into hospitals. Women were not treated. Remote villages did not have the availability of an on call doctor. Now almost every rural person in India has a smartphone and internet (there are about 1,04,259 gram panchayats that have WiFi Hotspots installed under BharatNet Project till January 2022 [16]) they can take online consultation. People can order medicines online which can be delivered to their houses in no time [15]. This is the scenario that Ambedkar envisioned for India — a free and fair community with equal opportunities for health, education and economic empowerment.

V. Conclusion

This paper presented the key aspects of how the information technology revolution can advance Ambedkarian thought and his ideologies within the Indian social and economic fabric. For long it has been thought that Ambedkar's ideologies can only be achieved by social means such as

policy making, legal formulation and education, but this paper discussed how discrimination by way of caste, creed, gender, language, etc. can be eliminated and equal opportunities can be provided to all people through IT services.

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