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Research Paper

Empowering Educators and Transforming Education: A Social Justice Approach to Teachers' Mental Health and Well-being Inspired by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

Vijay Shree Jaiswal[1]*

ABSTRACT

Kyriacou (2000), Travers & Cooper (1996), and Dunham & Varma (1998) survey data indicate that teaching is one of the highly stressful professions (cited in Kyriacou, 2001; Au et al., 2016). Considering the above data, this study examines the transformative potential of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar's visionary ideas on social justice and their impact on teachers' psychological well-being. It explores how his teachings can address the issues currently faced by teachers, particularly the impact of institutional injustices and social limitations on their mental well-being. The study proposes strategies to foster educators' mental health and facilitate the realisation of this vision through the framework of social justice and empowerment, as informed by Ambedkar's philosophical principles. This study aims to inspire hope and enrich the existing literature on inclusive education and social change by applying an interdisciplinary framework. Ambedkar's rich philosophy in conceptualising schemes to develop a supportive and empowering ecosystem for the teaching community, thereby advancing inclusive education and fostering genuine social change.

Keywords: *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Psychological Well-Being, Equity in Society, Teachers' Mental Health, Social Justice*

Besides being a chief framer of the Indian Constitution, jurist and social reformer who fought for the rights of downtrodden sections and exposed structural injustice, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar emerged as the principal architect of an inclusive India. He offered a fundamental blueprint for social justice that foregrounded equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity. His legacy is not limited to the Indian Constitution, but also extends to his interventions in education. He thought that education could bring social change by imparting equal access to education and socio-political empowerment of marginalised communities, especially Dalits, women, and religious minorities. Women's emancipation was the very heart of his thinking. He created a groundwork for an inclusive democracy. Ambedkar regarded education as a powerful instrument for transforming society. He believed that everyone should be provided with education regardless of his/her caste, creed, or sex. In his classic work "Annihilation of Caste", he argued that education is the only way to remove societal hierarchies and establish equality among people. This focus on education as a tool

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Education, Dr. Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar, M.P.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6805-5437
*Corresponding Author

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for self-determination resonates strongly with educators, who often view themselves as agents of change within their communities.

However, sometimes due to social injustice and educational inequalities/inequities, teachers suffer from mental health issues. They experience stress, burnout, and psychological suffering as a result of institutional problems, cultural expectations, and demanding work at the workplace and outside the workplace (Bishwakarma, 2017). Excessive stress and anxiety have been associated with teaching for various reasons, including long work hours, voluminous workloads, administrative pressures, and the emotional labour required to cater to diverse student needs (Bedi & Mamtha, 2017; Agyapong et al., 2022).

Professionals who represent underrepresented demographics, apart from all the stressors generated due to discrimination and microaggressions and because of insufficient institutional support, may bear more added stressors at psychological levels due to powerlessness and prejudice, endangering their mental health even more (Pagan, 2024; Sandhu, 2023; Zambrana et al., 2021).

In this regard, Dr. Ambedkar's ideas of empowerment and social justice help us understand the psychological problems teachers face. We know that the basis of his thinking is self-respect and dignity, which are the basic needs for the emancipation of human and social life. His principles aim to create a workplace atmosphere free of hostility by treating employees with respect, upholding their rights, and allowing them to enjoy their freedom (Simatwal, 2024).

Besides that, teachers' mental health is influenced by addressing the inequalities that are the root cause of the problem in the educational sector. Ambedkar's appeal for systemic change reaches a climax in a loud call for the abolition of discriminatory practices to create inclusive environments where every teacher is cherished and respected. The active measures needed to deal with it should be as powerful as the determination to solve the problem.

Moreover, school internal issues are the main cause of the instructors ' mental health problems and their general welfare. Ambedkar's demand for change and justice in society may be seen as a call to end discriminatory practices and create an atmosphere where teachers are respected, loved, and treated without discrimination. That focus on equality and respect should be the reason each educator feels respected and receives the recognition they deserve.

Among his numerous publications, Dr. Ambedkar had always made it clear that the concepts of social justice and mental health must be considered together. This paper attempts to consider Dr. Ambedkar's notions and their potential pertinence to teachers in developing their practice in connection to social justice and mental health.

Significance of the Study

Dr Ambedkar's works, both directly and indirectly, provide a wealth of insight into the connections between social justice and mental health concerns. His focus on eliminating discrimination based on caste, class, gender, socioeconomic status, and inequality strongly resonates with the current conversation around mental health concerns of teachers and social inclusion at the workplace. His criticism of societal systems emphasises the need for inclusive strategies to address the underlying causes of inequality and mental health

concerns. These strategies involve creating a safe, encouraging, and supportive environment that fosters holistic development, which can be incorporated into instructional strategies to promote teachers' mental health and overall wellbeing (Moon, 2018; Kamble, 2017). By aligning educational practices with Ambedkar's principles, the system can play a pivotal role in fostering an equitable, supportive environment for the mental health of both teachers and students.

Objective

The objective of the article is to examine the social justice approach towards the mental health and wellbeing of teachers. It focuses on how teachers can integrate Dr. Ambedkar's principles and ideas into their practices to propose strategies for empowering themselves. Through this lens, the study aspires to highlight the critical connection between social justice and mental health.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is grounded in the analysis of secondary data comprising Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's original works and speeches (e.g., Annihilation of Caste, parliamentary debates, etc.), Constitutional provisions, particularly the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy, academic books, journal articles, etc., to examine Ambedkar's visionary ideas on social justice. To provide an analytical perspective on the mental health and psychological well-being of teachers in the workplace. A descriptive-analytical research framework has been adopted in this study.

Understanding Dr. Ambedkar's ideas of Social Justice as a Prerequisite for Wellbeing of Teachers

After a deep understanding of Ambedkar's ideas on social justice and empowerment, one can reach a point where they address teachers' psychological well-being and offer a robust philosophical foundation for understanding and promoting it. His principles, grounded in the eradication of inequalities and discrimination, offer a framework for creating a healthy and respectful environment for educators. His vision for a society was built on the pillars of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

For him, liberty was not only political freedom but also freedom from social oppression and the ability to live life with dignity. For teachers, liberty would imply freedom from oppressive hierarchies, organisational discrimination, and unnecessary control over their pedagogical practices. When teachers are free to try new things, be themselves, and teach without fear of prejudice based on caste, gender, or other social markers, their professional autonomy increases significantly, a precondition for psychological well-being. Ambedkar also believed that "*Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone*" and should enable people to "*rediscover themselves and ensure freedom*" (Doddamani & Ramesh, 2024; Kumar & Ratne, 2018). The same understanding of freedom applies to the teachers themselves.

He was continuously committed to providing equal opportunities and ending discrimination throughout his life. Writings, including 'Who Were the Shudras?' (Ambedkar, 1946), Provide an extensive account of the historical denial of equality. Applying this to teachers implies the need for equal access to resources and opportunities for professional development, equitable promotion policies, and merit-based evaluation systems, irrespective of social background. Discrimination practices like caste-based or gender-based

discrimination at any age can severely dent a teacher's ego and cause stress and aggression. Ambedkar's life mission against the caste system was to build a society in which individuals would be judged by their abilities rather than their caste or social status (Behera & Behera, 2024). This concept directly corresponds to establishing an equal and fair work culture for teachers.

Ambedkar emphasised the philosophy of brotherhood and solidarity as inherent features of a harmonised society. In the context of schools, a fraternity fosters a culture of support and belonging, where teachers are valued and stay connected to their colleagues. They also become part of a common cause within the school premises. If any school fails in this regard, it leads to disconnection, adds stress, and lowers teachers' morale. Ambedkar proposed a society in which no social injustice is inflicted on these sections (Nandini & Singh, 2025). For such a vision to succeed, all teachers must feel valued and welcome.

Understanding Institutional Injustice and Social Limitations: A Critical Analysis from an Ambedkarite Perspective on Teacher Well-being

Teachers in present times experience multiple challenges that, if seen through the lens of Ambedkar's ideas, become institutional injustice and social limitations that directly affect their mental health. Below are the analyses of the types of institutional injustice and social limitations that teachers face in their workplace.

Discrimination and Marginalisation within the Education System: Despite Constitutional Assurances, Discrimination Continues as…

- **Caste-based Discrimination:** Teachers who belong to historically marginalised groups (Dalit and/or Adivasi) may experience hidden or clear discrimination by fellow teachers, administrators, and even by parents (Sharma, 2024; Sphoorti, 2025). This can be taken as discriminatory tasks, denial of career advancement, or social exclusion. These experiences are psychologically harmful, resulting in stress, anxiety, and alienation (Nandini & Singh, 2025). Dr Ambedkar's experience and knowledge of the pervasive nature of caste (e.g., Annihilation of Caste) provide a theoretical framework for understanding the ongoing injustices in the school context.
- **Gender Harassment and Bias:** Female teachers are often faced with gender biases and stereotypes, "glass ceilings", pay disparity, lack of mentorship and support networks, underrepresentation in STEM education, and sometimes workplace harassment and discrimination (Evans, 2017; Papadopoulos, 2018; Teacher Pool, 2023; Andersen, 2023). This contradicts their liberty and equality, making the working environment unfriendly. Ambedkar was a fierce advocate for gender equality, recognising the intersection of caste and patriarchy, and played a pivotal role in drafting legal provisions for gender rights (Drishti IAS, 2025).
- **Socioeconomic Inequalities:** Teachers in resource-deprived schools, usually teaching marginalised populations, encounter substandard infrastructure, the absence of materials, and overcrowded classes. These inequalities of structure, a direct result of a breakdown in the application of principles of distributive justice (an idea underlying Ambedkar's advocacy for fair distribution of resources), contribute to excessive stress and feelings of inadequacy (Schwaertz, Cappella & Aber, 2019; UNESCO, 2014; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Appleton, Sives, & Morgan, 2006; Sargent & Hannum, 2005).

Loss of Professional Agency and Autonomy: Ambedkar championed individual agency and dignity (Rastogi, Singh, & Awadhiya, 2024). The modern educational system often restricts teacher autonomy as...

- **Top-down Policies and Excessive Bureaucracy:** Teachers are habitually treated to prescriptive curricula, over-bureaucratic administrative paperwork, and non-involvement in decision-making (Ahmet, 2022; LEITER, 1986). This weakening of professional autonomy can contribute to feelings of helplessness, de-professionalisation, and demotivation (Ahmet, 2022). Dr. Ambedkar emphasised the importance of education in promoting critical thinking and self-reliance, indirectly criticising systems that undermine independent judgment and initiative among professionals.
- **Impractical Expectations and Workload:** Teachers are usually overloaded with non-teaching responsibilities, large classes, and being pushed to deliver results in a competitive setting (Vyas & Gupta, 2023; Galton & MacBeath, 2008). This unnecessary workload, often accompanied by little support, significantly contributes to burnout and psychological distress (Kashyap et al., 2024; Travers & Cooper, 1996). This amounts to a denial of the "right to work with dignity," a derivative of constitutionally enshrined Fundamental Rights (e.g., Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, interpreted to mean the right to live with dignity).

No Recognition and Dignity

- **Public Perception and Devaluation of the Profession:** Although in a key role, teachers feel devalued by policymakers and society (Koons, 2023; Akiba et al., 2023). Such non-recognition, frequently coupled with poor working conditions and low remuneration, damages their self-esteem and professional pride (Mboweni & Taole, 2022). Ambedkar, aware of the central role of education in nation-building, would undoubtedly emphasise the importance of maintaining educators' dignity and respect. The Preamble's focus on the "dignity of the individual" directly supports it.

Strategies for Building Teacher Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing based on Ambedkar's Ideology and Philosophy:

Achieving Ambedkar's vision of an empowered society requires implementing concrete processes in the education system that prioritise teacher well-being above all else.

Maintaining Constitutional Values: Protection of Justice and Equality

There are constitutional provisions for the protection of justice and equality. However, by analysing the aforementioned research and experiences, the researcher reaches the conclusion that there is a need for strong implementation and follow-up of policies and provisions as...

- **Strong Anti-Discrimination Policies and Enforcement:** Schools need to implement and enforce anti-caste, anti-gender, anti-religious, and other discrimination policies. These need to have open grievance redressal mechanisms and affirmative steps to improve diversity and inclusion. All this is entirely in harmony with what Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution had in mind, which were significantly shaped by Ambedkar's work.
- **Equitable Distribution of Resources and Infrastructure:** Bridging the socioeconomic divides in the schools with equitable funding, appropriate infrastructure, and access to learning facilities. It represents a feasible realisation of Ambedkar's vision for substantive equality. It aligns with the letter and spirit of the

Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), specifically Articles 38 and 39, which aim to establish a social order based on justice and to minimise inequalities in income, status, facilities, and opportunities.

- **Equitable Remuneration and Workload Planning:** The establishment of equitable remuneration systems, manageable class sizes, and an equitable distribution of non-teaching responsibilities is essential for promoting a healthy work environment in educational settings. Such measures not only uphold the dignity of labour by ensuring that all educators are fairly compensated for their contributions but also help mitigate the primary stressors that can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction. Research has shown that when educators are provided with reasonable workloads and equitable pay, it enhances job performance and increases retention rates and ultimately leads to better educational outcomes for students (Ingersoll, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010). By prioritising these aspects, institutions can cultivate a more sustainable and supportive work culture that values educators' wellbeing and maximises their effectiveness in the classroom.

Professional Empowerment and Reinforcement of Teacher Agency

- **Decentralised Decision-Making and Teacher Voice:** Engaging teachers in curriculum planning, policy-making, and school administration. This fosters ownership and autonomy (Team Varthana, 2023, October 31; Alsubaie, 2016), aligning with Ambedkar's emphasis on individual agency and self-respect. Autonomous teachers are more innovative, confident, and motivated (Yorulmaz & Çolak, 2023).
- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Critical Pedagogy and Social Justice:** CPD not only enhances teaching skills but also fosters critical consciousness, incorporating societal concerns, inclusive education, and the teacher as an agent of change. This aligns with Ambedkar's concept of education as a means to reform society (Doddamani & Ramesh, 2024).
- **Peer Support Networks and Mentorship Programs:** Implement successful peer support networks and mentorship programs to combat loneliness, share best practices, and offer emotional support, thereby fostering a sense of community and fraternity within the teaching profession (Shalaby & Agyapong, 2020).

Establishing a Culture of Dignity and Respect

- **Encouraging Respect for the Teaching Profession:** Organising public awareness programs and campaigns that highlight the invaluable contribution to society can significantly transform the attitude and perception of the public and elevate the status of the teaching profession, as envisioned in Ambedkar's initiative of the "dignity of the individual" as articulated in the Preamble. This can foster a deeper appreciation for educators.
- **Access to Psychological Help:** Providing teachers with accessible, confidential mental health support and counselling and destigmatising mental illnesses tends to foster teachers' mental health and general well-being (NCERT, 2024). This objective remains vital to enabling teachers to execute their role optimally. NEP 2020 also addresses teachers' mental well-being and aims to create a more nurturing environment (NCERT, 2024).

The Interdisciplinary Framework and Future Directions

It highlights the fact that the philosophical perspective on social justice and empowerment developed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has immense historical value and remains relevant to the present problems faced by teachers. Following his principles, the painful impact of institutional injustices and societal constraints on teachers' mental health and overall well-being comes into sharper relief.

This study takes an interdisciplinary approach to uncover the social and institutional barriers and factors that shape educators' mental health. An integration of insights from political philosophy, sociology, education, and psychology clarifies the current situation of teachers in society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar saw education as the main way to achieve social change. He argued for an engaged and supportive teaching population and imagined a society where liberty, equality, and fraternity thrive. Individual and collective growth would be assured. This vision allows us to create a reality where teachers feel energised and are mentally well. They will be able to enhance student and school education, leading to positive impacts across the board. While this research establishes a solid conceptual link, follow-up studies could include the following aspects:

- Future researchers can conduct empirical research, using both qualitative and/or quantitative methods, to examine how social justice initiatives influence the mental health of teachers in multicultural school settings.
- Longitudinal studies are another kind of research that can help researchers track changes and development over time. This method enables monitoring teachers' psychological well-being in response to system reforms, especially those related to social justice.
- Comparative analysis research can compare the well-being of educators in schools that effectively implement Ambedkarite principles with those that do not, providing deeper insights for researchers.
- In-depth Case Studies of successful schools could be conducted in future research, which will help build an inclusive environment and empower teachers by learning from their practices.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social empowerment and justice that were advocated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar are like a treasure trove when we think about the psychological welfare of teachers in India. His consistent fight against discrimination, promotion of true equality, and faith in education as a potent tool for emancipation are a model for developing not only learner-centric but also teacher-psychologically well-being education systems.

By dealing with the imbalances inside the institution, elevating the voice, and inculcating the culture of dignity and recognition, much can be done to eliminate the unjust society, which is the vision Dr. Ambedkar envisaged. Healthy and empowered teachers who are, paradoxically, as in the case with themselves, the foundation for the development of critical consciousness, social responsibility, and a healthy democratic ethos among the next generation.

Keeping that in view, it is the responsibility of policymakers, educational leaders, and researchers to utilise the teachings of Ambedkar to find ways to support and strengthen the teacher ecosystem as a mode to drive inclusive education that leads to authentic social transformation.

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Conflict of Interest

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