

Dismantling Discrimination: The Journey from Manusmriti to Modern Legal Reforms for Marginalized Groups

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ABSTRACT

The Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu legal text, has profoundly influenced the social and legal landscape of ancient Indian society, particularly in shaping the status of Shudras and women. This study explores the evolution of the legal and social status of these marginalized groups from the Manusmriti era to the Indian Constitution, conscripted under the guidance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Through a historical and comparative analysis, the research examines the discriminatory prescriptions of the Manusmriti and contrasts them with the progressive constitutional provisions that guarantee rights and equality. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing primary sources such as Manusmriti texts, historical documents, and Ambedkar's writings, alongside secondary sources including scholarly articles and books. The findings highlight the significant shift from the hierarchical and discriminatory social order prescribed in the Manusmriti to the egalitarian principles preserved in the Ambedkar-led Constitution. However, the study also acknowledges the persistent gap between constitutional ideals and social realities, as deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and practices continue to perpetuate discrimination against Shudras and women in various spheres of life. The research underscores the ongoing challenges in bridging this divide and the critical role of education, economic empowerment, and social movements in furthering the cause of equality. The study subsidizes to the understanding of the complex interplay between religious doctrine, social norms, and legal frameworks in shaping the lives of marginalized communities in India, while emphasizing the enduring importance of Ambedkar's vision in the pursuit of social justice

Keywords: Manusmriti, Hindu legal text, Shudras, Women, Social hierarchy Discrimination Ambedkar, Indian Constitution.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Manusmriti, a pivotal ancient Hindu legal document, has significantly influenced the social and legal framework of ancient Indian civilization. Composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE, this authoritative text codified the caste system and established hierarchical social structures that have profoundly affected Hindu law and traditions (The Manusmriti (200 BCE–200 CE), 2017). Its teachings on social order, gender roles, and legal principles have been especially influential in determining the status of Shudras, the lowest caste, and women within the societal hierarchy. As a foundational text in Hindu law and social organization, the Manusmriti has deeply impacted the societal structure of ancient India, particularly in its treatment of Shudras and women (Kumari, 2024). This ancient legal code enforces a rigid social hierarchy, positioning Shudras at the bottom of the caste system, thereby significantly affecting their legal, economic, and social standing. The text's directives for Shudras include numerous restrictions, from limited job opportunities to restricted legal rights and religious involvement (Kapur, 2023). These limitations have extensive implications for the social mobility, educational access, and economic prospects of individuals identified as Shudras. This study seeks to examine the profound impact of the Manusmriti on ancient Indian society, concentrating on its role in maintaining social hierarchies and its enduring effects on marginalized groups (Hossain & Sultana, 2024). By exploring the text's historical context and its interpretations over time, we aim to comprehend the intricate connection between religious doctrine, social norms, and legal practices in shaping the lives of individuals in ancient India. By analyzing the specific provisions of the Manusmriti concerning Shudras, this study aims to illuminate the historical origins of social inequality in Hindu society and its lasting impact on marginalized groups (Sobirovich & Kleiner, 2024). The Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu legal text, has played a crucial role in shaping social hierarchies and gender roles within Hindu society. This influential work has had extensive implications for the status and rights of both Shudras, the lowest caste in the traditional Hindu social structure, and women (Meena, 2024). The text's prescriptions have contributed to the long-standing marginalization of these groups, affecting their social, legal, and economic position (Divya & Ankur, 2019). This study examines the Manusmriti's depiction of Shudras and women, focusing on how its teachings have influenced their status and opportunities within Hindu society. By analyzing the text's directives on social roles, legal rights, economic participation, and behavioral expectations, we aim to throw light on the historical roots of inequality and the enduring effects of these ancient prescriptions on contemporary Hindu society.

The 19th & 20th centuries were a time of significant social change in India, especially regarding the status of Shudras and women. This period saw the rise of influential social reformers, anti-caste movements, and women's rights activism that challenged long-standing societal norms and hierarchies (Kumari, 2024). Reformers like Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy played central roles in supporting for the rights of marginalized groups and questioning the caste system. Simultaneously, women's rights movements gained momentum, with activists such as Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, and Sarojini Naidu championing causes like women's education, property rights, and political participation (Pandey, 2022). The British colonial era also influenced these changes through legal reforms, although their implementation and effectiveness were often hindered by entrenched social norms and conservative resistance (Oto-Peralías & Romero-Ávila, 2017). This study delves into the intricate interplay of social movements, legal reforms, and cultural shifts that characterized this transformative period in Indian history

The adoption of India's Constitution in 1950 was a landmark event in the country's history, signifying a major move towards creating a fairer society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a distinguished economist, jurist and social reformer, was fundamental in this transformation as the chief architect of the Constitution. His work was crucial in confronting the caste system's discriminatory elements and advocating for the rights of marginalized communities. The Constitution sought to embed principles of equality, justice, and non-discrimination, moving away from the hierarchical structures described in ancient texts like the Manusmriti (Yoganandham, 2024). Nevertheless, despite these legal changes, entrenched social norms and practices continued to shape the experiences women and shudras in post-independence India (Chakraborty, 2024) (K, 2023). This ongoing presence of traditional hierarchies underscores the complex relationship between constitutional reform and societal change, raising important questions about the effectiveness of legal measures in addressing deep-rooted social inequalities.

The Indian Constitution, a fundamental element of the world's largest democracy, embodies the ideals of social justice and equality advocated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. As the principal architect of this pivotal document, Ambedkar's relentless battle against caste-based discrimination and gender inequality profoundly shaped its tenets (Meena & Dhayal, 2025). This study delves into Ambedkar's vision for the Constitution, highlighting his endeavors to dismantle the hierarchical caste system, particularly the subjugation of Shudras and Dalits (Scheduled Castes), and to advance women's rights and dignity. It investigates how Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice and equality for marginalized groups was woven into the constitutional framework, with the aim of fostering a genuinely democratic society. The analysis also views the Constitution as a transformative instrument, crafted to guarantee equal opportunities and comprehensive socio-political participation for historically oppressed communities, mirroring Ambedkar's dedication to forging a more equitable India.

This vision was embedded in several crucial constitutional provisions. The Fundamental Rights (Part III) ensure equality before the law (Article 14), forbid discrimination based on race, caste, religion, sex, or place of birth (Article 15), and secure equivalent prospect in public employment (Article 16) (-, 2024) (Narain, 2022). The Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) further instruct the state to promote social and economic welfare, aiming to diminish inequalities and safeguard the interests of weaker sections (Bhatia, 2016) (Venkatesha & Krishna, 2019). Specific articles like Article 17 abolish "untouchability," while Article 46 mandates the state to advance the economical and educational interests of Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections. For women, Article 15(3) permits the state to reform special requirements for their benefit, and Article 39 stresses equal pay and adequate means of livelihood (Ali, 2023). These provisions reflect Ambedkar's dedication to establishing a just and inclusive society through constitutional measures.

Social status has experienced changes in societal attitudes, with a growing awareness and acceptance of diversity in many areas. Public discourse and media representation have become more inclusive, mirroring evolving social norms (Germano et al., 2021). However, ongoing discrimination and deeply rooted stereotypes continue to impact marginalized groups in various aspects of life (Campbell et al., 2024). While overt prejudice may have lessened in some areas, subtle forms of bias and microaggressions persist, affecting social interactions and opportunities (Dovidio et al., 2018). Economic opportunities have broadened through improved access to education and employment for previously excluded groups. Affirmative action policies, diversity initiatives, and targeted educational programs have opened pathways to higher education and professional advancement (Sangar, 2014). Nonetheless, continuing disparities and obstacles remain evident in wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and limited access to capital and resources for entrepreneurship (Gyimah-Brempong & Fichtenbaum, 1997) (Ergün et al., 2024). Systemic inequalities in economic structures continue to present challenges for achieving full parity in economic opportunities and outcomes (Amiri et al., 2024).

In modern India, the intersection of caste and gender creates a complex network of social hierarchies and discrimination. Women from lower castes often endure dual marginalization, facing oppression due to both their gender and caste (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015) (Gohel, 2022). This intersectionality poses distinct challenges in areas like education, employment, and social mobility. For example, Dalit women may face greater obstacles in accessing education or be more vulnerable to violence compared to women from higher castes or men from lower castes (N, 2023).

The gap between constitutional ideals and reality remains a major hurdle in tackling caste-based discrimination. Although the Indian Constitution ensures equality and prohibits caste-based discrimination, the practical application of these principles encounters numerous challenges (Rathod, 2017). Deep-rooted social norms, lack of awareness, insufficient enforcement

mechanisms, and resistance from privileged groups contribute to the persistence of caste-based inequalities. This gap between legal provisions and social realities has led to ongoing debates and movements for equality (Aggarwal, 2024). Grassroots organizations, activists, and policy advocates continue to push for more effective implementation of anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action policies, and social awareness campaigns to bridge the gap between constitutional promises and the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Sharma, 2017).

The study examines the key changes and continuities in the status of Shudras and women from ancient India to the present. It underscores the significant shift from the hierarchical and discriminatory social order outlined in Manusmriti to the egalitarian principles enshrined in the Ambedkar constitution. This journey represents a profound ideological and legal transformation, moving from a system that institutionalized inequality to one that guarantees equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of caste or gender.

However, the study also recognizes that while legal and constitutional changes have been monumental, social realities often lag behind. Deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and practices continue to perpetuate discrimination against Shudras and women in various spheres of life. Looking towards the future, the study likely explores the challenges and opportunities in bridging the gap between constitutional ideals and social realities. It may discuss the role of education, economic empowerment, and social movements in furthering the cause of equality, as well as the ongoing need for vigilance and activism to safeguard that the rights certain by the constitution are fully realized in practice for Shudras and women across India.

This study aims to trace the evolution of the legal and social status of Shudras and women from the Manusmriti era to the Ambedkar-led Indian Constitution, highlighting key transformations and enduring continuities in their treatment. It compares the discriminatory prescriptions of Manusmriti with the progressive constitutional provisions that guarantee rights and equality for these marginalized groups. The research evaluates the role of social reform movements and legal changes in improving their status, while also assessing how effectively the Constitution addresses caste- and gender-based discrimination. It explores the intersectionality of caste and gender in contemporary India, identifies gaps between constitutional ideals and societal realities, and investigates the ongoing challenges to achieving true equality for Shudras and women today.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A complete literature review was conducted to recognize relevant sources that discuss the legal and social status of Shudras and women from the Manusmriti era to the Ambedkar constitution. (Bilton et al., 2021), The discourse surrounding legal and social justice in India has evolved significantly, particularly as it pertains to marginalized communities. Historical texts such as the Manusmriti have been critiqued for perpetuating caste-based discrimination and gender inequities, which set the stage for modern legislative reforms aimed at dismantling these hierarchies. Scholars like Ambedkar underscore the necessity of revisiting ancient social structures. The examination of contemporary literature reveals a shift in focus from mere activism to a broader narrative that celebrates the achievements of Dalit communities, addressing complexities arising from intersecting identities. This evolution is essential in understanding the literary landscapes reflection of social movements, as it highlights the tension between traditional orthodoxies and modern demands for equality and justice. (Sirswal et al., 2016), This study shows Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's contributions to social justice represent a fundamental reconfiguration of Indias socio-legal landscape, profoundly influencing the rights of marginalized groups, particularly Shudras and women. His critique of the Manusmriti and caste-based discrimination established a framework for analyzing social hierarchies, demonstrating how ancient texts perpetuated inequalities. Ambedkars relentless advocacy for an inclusive society culminated in the Indian Constitution, which aimed to dismantle discriminatory practices through robust provisions for equality and justice. Ambedkars vision of equality remains essential for contemporary movements, as it confronts ongoing challenges in achieving genuine inclusivity and social harmony within Indian society, evidencing the enduring legacy of his work in the pursuit of equality. (Vina M Goghari et al., 2023), The historical trajectory of womens rights in India, as framed by ancient legal texts and contemporary reforms, reveals a persistent struggle against systemic oppression and discrimination. Early texts like the Manusmriti entrenched social norms that perpetuated gender inequities, shaping practices of exclusion that marginalized women and defined their societal roles in a restrictive manner. The groundwork laid by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his vision for an inclusive Constitution marked a turning point, aiming to dismantle the patriarchal structures inherent in earlier socio-legal frameworks and advocating for gender equality, which continues to influence current movements for womens rights.

(Frederic Megret et al., 2023), The literature synthesis highlights how, despite legislative advancements catalyzed by reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who envisioned a more equitable India through constitutional frameworks, challenges rooted in historical discriminatory practices persist. The contemporary legal environment, still influenced by the remnants of colonialist ideologies, requires ongoing scrutiny, especially as caste dynamics evolve within diverse diaspora contexts. By exploring the continual ramifications of exclusionary practices on marginalized groups, this research will address significant gaps, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how legal frameworks can better promote equality for Shudras and align with Ambedkars vision of social justice. (Mehta et al., 2013), The ongoing discourse surrounding legal and social justice in India often overlooks the intricate interconnection between historical texts and contemporary frameworks aimed at

fostering equality. A critical analysis of ancient legal texts, like the Manusmriti, reveals how these writings perpetuated systemic inequalities and exclusionary practices, establishing a foundation that impacts marginalized communities today. In contrast, Ambedkar's vision for an inclusive India, as articulated in his advocacy for the Hindu Code Bill, directly challenges these norms. (Banerjee et al., 2023), This research underscores the necessity of continued legal reforms and social movements to address systemic discrimination that remains prevalent in private and public spheres, as evidenced by findings indicating the ineffectiveness of existing laws against private caste discrimination. The nuanced resistances faced during the constitution's formation, particularly regarding gender and caste dynamics. The shifts brought by British colonialism and its legal reforms which intersected with pre-existing hierarchies, as well as the consequent effects on marginalized demographics. (Sharma et al., 2022), This research not only traces the evolution from ancient texts such as the Manusmriti, which institutionalized caste-based discrimination, to the comprehensive legal framework established by Ambedkar's Constitution, but it also highlights the ongoing struggles for social justice faced by marginalized communities and women today. Understanding the historical context of exclusion helps unveil the persistent impact of these injustices, particularly how past practices have shaped social norms and legal stipulations that still influence current disparities. The importance of this inquiry lies in its potential to inform contemporary policy and advocacy efforts aimed at fostering genuine equality and inclusion. (Kumar et al., 2023), The study necessitates a mixed-methods strategy, mixing both qualitative and quantitative data to comprehend a comprehensive analysis. This encompasses a thorough literature review which synthesizes existing knowledge while identifying gaps in current research, particularly in relation to the long-standing impact of texts like the Manusmriti on marginalized communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a historical and comparative method to analyze the evolution of legal and social status of Shudras and women over time. Primary sources such as Manusmriti texts, historical documents, and Ambedkar's writings were utilized alongside secondary sources including scholarly articles and books. Data was collected through archival research, examining historical texts, legal documents, and existing scholarly literature.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the evolution of the legal and social status of Shudras and women through a historical and comparative lens. Using primary sources such as Manusmriti, historical documents, and the writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, alongside secondary sources like scholarly articles and books, this research highlights the shifts in their position over time.

Table 1 Analysis of the legal and social status of Shudras and women in historical context

Aspect	Shudras	Women
Legal Status	Lowest varna, primarily servants	Dependent on male relatives
Education	Forbidden from studying Vedas	Forbidden from studying Vedas
Religious Rights	Excluded from rituals and sacrifices	Could only perform household rituals
Occupational Roles	Restricted to service and labor	Domestic duties, no independent career
Marriage & Family	Subject to strict varna endogamy	No independent choice, subject to arranged marriage
Property Rights	Limited ownership rights	Allowed stridhan but lacked control over family wealth
Legal Punishments	Harsher penalties compared to higher castes	Controlled by patriarchal legal codes
Social Mobility	Almost none, except in later periods	Rare, limited to influential royal women or religious figures

Table 1 analyze the legal and social status of Shudras and women in historical context, focusing on their education, religious rights, occupational roles, marriage and family, property rights, legal punishments, and social mobility.

The legal and social constraints imposed on Shudras and women affected their roles and status in society. Our observations indicate that both Shudras and women were subjected to numerous restrictions that limited their participation in various societal aspects. The findings reveal that Shudras and women were systematically excluded from educational opportunities,

religious practices, and occupational roles, reinforcing their subordinate status. Comparing the restrictions faced by Shudras and women, it is evident that both groups were denied access to education and religious rights, though the nature of their limitations varied. There is a strong correlation between the legal constraints placed on Shudras and women and their limited social mobility, highlighting the impact of systemic discrimination. The interpretation of these findings suggests that the rigid social hierarchy and patriarchal norms played a significant role in perpetuating the marginalization of Shudras and women. The reasoning behind these restrictions can be attributed to the desire to maintain social order and control, ensuring the dominance of higher varnas and male authority. It can be speculated that the occasional social mobility experienced by some Shudras and influential women was due to exceptional circumstances rather than a shift in societal norms. Supporting data from historical texts and legal codes provide evidence of the harsher penalties and limited property rights imposed on Shudras and women. Caution must be exercised in generalizing these findings, as variations in regional practices and historical periods may have influenced the extent of these restrictions.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, was a strong critic of Manusmriti due to its caste-based and gender-discriminatory laws. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, aimed to establish an egalitarian society by dismantling the hierarchical structures codified in ancient texts like the Manusmriti.

Table 2 Comparative analysis Manusmriti and Ambedkar’s constitution

Aspect	Manusmriti (Ancient Hindu Law)	Ambedkar’s Constitution (1950)
Legal Status	Shudras at the bottom of the varna system, women subordinate to men	Equality for all citizens regardless of caste, gender, or religion
Education Rights	Shudras and women forbidden from studying the Vedas	Right to education granted to all under Article 21A
Religious Rights	Shudras and women excluded from Vedic rituals	Freedom of religion guaranteed under Article 25
Occupational Rights	Shudras restricted to servitude	Right to equal opportunity in employment (Articles 16 & 19)
Marriage and Family	Women had no choice in marriage, widow remarriage discouraged	Women given equal marriage rights; child marriage banned
Property Rights	Women had limited rights over stridhan	Equal property rights ensured under Hindu Succession Act (1956)
Legal Protection	Shudras received harsher punishments, women had no legal autonomy	Equal protection under the law (Article 14)
Social Mobility	No scope for upward mobility	Reservation policies (Articles 15(4), 16(4)) for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and women

Table 2 analyze the impact of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's constitutional reforms on the social status of Shudras (Dalits) and women in India.

The Indian Constitution of 1950 contrasts with Manusmriti in terms of caste and gender equality. Observations reveal significant disparities between the ancient Hindu laws codified in Manusmriti and the egalitarian principles enshrined in Ambedkar’s Constitution. Findings indicate that Ambedkar’s Constitution successfully dismantled many of the discriminatory practices against Shudras and women prevalent in Manusmriti. A comparative analysis shows that while Manusmriti enforced rigid caste hierarchies and gender subordination, Ambedkar’s Constitution promoted equality and social justice. There is a strong correlation between the constitutional provisions introduced by Ambedkar and the improved legal and social status of Shudras and women.

The analysis of the data indicates that Ambedkar's reforms played a crucial role in advancing social mobility and providing legal safeguards for marginalized communities. The rationale behind Ambedkar's constitutional amendments stems from his aspiration to establish a society where caste and gender discrimination are absent. It is believed that, without Ambedkar's efforts, the hierarchical systems enshrined in Manusmriti might have continued, obstructing the path to equality. Evidence supporting this includes provisions in the Indian Constitution that ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, in stark contrast to the discriminatory statutes of Manusmriti. However, it is important to recognize that constitutional amendments alone may not be sufficient to eliminate deeply ingrained social biases.

Table 3 Legal Principles in the *Manusmriti* and Their Effects on Ancient Indian Law

Aspect	Legal Principles in the Manusmriti	Effects on Ancient Indian Law
Nature of Law	Law is divine in origin; based on Vedas, tradition, customs, and personal conscience	Law was intertwined with religion and morality, lacking a secular legal framework
Justice and Punishment	Emphasizes danda (punishment) to maintain order and dharma	Justice seen as a religious duty; law enforcement tied to maintaining cosmic and social order
Caste-based Justice	Punishments varied by varna; Brahmins received leniency, Shudras were punished harshly	Created a discriminatory legal system, institutionalizing caste hierarchy in law
Family & Inheritance	Patrilineal; limited rights for women except <i>stridhan</i>	Reinforced male dominance in property and inheritance law
Contracts & Property	Recognized ownership, debt, lending, and trade; honesty emphasized	Provided basic legal framework for property and civil disputes
Crime and Penalties	Codified numerous offenses and detailed punishments (fines, exile, corporal punishment)	Developed formal punitive system but applied unevenly based on caste and gender
Role of the King	King must uphold dharma, protect society, and consult Brahmins	Legal power rested with theocratic monarchy, influenced by priestly advisors
Judicial Process	Relied on witnesses, ordeals, and the king's judgment	Judicial procedures formalized, but truth-seeking was filtered through caste and religious bias
Long-Term Influence	Inspired other Dharmaśāstra texts; used during British rule to codify Hindu personal laws	Shaped Hindu law for centuries; colonial legal codes adopted many of its principles
Criticism & Legacy	Criticized for promoting casteism, patriarchy, and inequality (e.g., by Ambedkar)	Eventually rejected in favor of constitutional, secular Indian law, but still studied today

Table 3 explores the legal doctrines embedded in the Manusmriti and their lasting impact on the legal framework of ancient India. The Manusmriti significantly influenced the evolution and execution of legal systems in ancient Indian society. Through an in-depth examination of the Manusmriti, several fundamental legal doctrines were identified, such as the divine origin of law and the focus on justice based on caste. The results suggest that the Manusmriti was instrumental in establishing caste hierarchy and reinforcing male dominance within ancient Indian legal practices. A comparison with other legal texts from the same period highlights notable differences in their approaches to justice, punishment, and the king's role. There is a clear connection between the principles set forth in the Manusmriti and the structure of ancient Indian law, especially regarding caste-based discrimination and the fusion of law with religion. The interpretation of the Manusmriti indicates that its legal doctrines were intended to uphold social order and cosmic balance through religiously endorsed practices. The rationale behind the Manusmriti's legal doctrines seems to be based on the belief that law and morality are intertwined, and justice must be in harmony with dharma. It can be inferred that the Manusmriti's focus on caste and gender-based justice contributed to enduring social inequalities in ancient India. Historical records and other Dharmaśāstra texts provide evidence supporting the Manusmriti's influence on ancient Indian legal systems. Caution is advised when interpreting the Manusmriti, as its doctrines may reflect the biases and societal norms of its time rather than universal legal standards.

Table 4 Relationship Between the *Manusmriti*'s Social Hierarchies and the Status of Shudras

Aspect	Details from the <i>Manusmriti</i>	Impact on Shudras in Ancient India
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Position in Varna System	Shudras placed as the fourth and lowest varna in a hereditary, hierarchical system	Assigned the lowest social rank with minimal rights
Duties and Roles	Only duty: serve the higher varnas, especially Brahmins	Confined to manual labor and servitude; denied religious and scholarly roles
Access to Education	Forbidden from reading or hearing the Vedas	Excluded from spiritual and intellectual development
Religious Rights	Barred from performing rituals or sacrifices	Marginalized from religious life and public ceremonies
Legal Status	Faced harsher punishments than higher varnas for similar crimes	Institutionalized legal inequality and fear
Property Rights	No inheritance rights unless granted by upper varnas	Economically dependent; lacked control over assets
Philosophical Justification	Originated from feet of Purusha in cosmic myth, symbolizing servitude	Used to justify their inferior status as divinely ordained
Social Mobility	No scope for upward mobility; caste was fixed by birth	Created a rigid and oppressive social order
Long-Term Impact	Reinforced caste divisions; influenced later "untouchable" status for some Shudra groups	Legacy of exclusion and discrimination endured for centuries
Resistance and Reform	Challenged by Buddhism, Bhakti movements, and modern reformers like Ambedkar	Sparked social justice movements and re-evaluation of caste-based norms

Table 4 examines the connection between the social hierarchies prescribed by the Manusmriti and the position of Shudras in ancient India. The hierarchical framework detailed in the Manusmriti influenced the social, economic, and religious standing of Shudras. The Manusmriti clearly positions Shudras at the lowest level of the varna system, assigning them servile roles and barring them from education and religious activities. Our research reveals that the Manusmriti established a system of inequality that significantly marginalized Shudras both socially and economically. Compared to the higher varnas, Shudras endured much harsher legal penalties and were systematically excluded from spiritual and intellectual endeavors. There is a strong link between the Manusmriti's directives and the prolonged socio-economic disenfranchisement of Shudras. The interpretation of these findings suggests that the hierarchical system of the Manusmriti was a crucial factor in sustaining caste-based discrimination. The rationale for the Manusmriti's placement of Shudras in the social hierarchy seems to be based on the mythological origins of the varna system, which justified their servitude as divinely ordained. It is speculated that the strict social structure enforced by the Manusmriti may have led to the development of the untouchable status for some Shudra groups. Supporting evidence includes historical records and scholarly analyses that document the long-term effects of the Manusmriti on the social status of Shudras. Caution is advised in interpreting these findings, as the Manusmriti is one of many texts that influenced ancient Indian society, and regional variations may have existed.

Table 5 Assess the long-term implications of the Manusmriti's teachings on Hindu customs and social structures.

Aspect	Long-Term Implication	Result
Caste Hierarchy	Institutionalized the four-fold <i>varna</i> system and laid the foundation for the <i>jati</i> system	Normalized hereditary occupation, social inequality, and caste-based discrimination
Religious Practices	Affirmed Brahmin supremacy in rituals and religious life	Lower castes often excluded from temples and sacred rites
Hindu Law and Social Norms	Influenced Dharmaśāstra tradition; shaped rules on marriage, inheritance, and conduct	Legal and moral codes justified caste and gender inequalities
Social Mobility	Linked caste and duty to birth, discouraging inter-caste relations or movement	Perpetuated rigid social boundaries and lack of upward mobility

Colonial Codification	Used by British rulers to define and enforce Hindu law during colonial rule	Caste distinctions gained legal backing, deepening divisions
Anti-Caste Movements	Provoked rejection by social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar	Inspired movements for equality, Dalit rights, and constitutional safeguards
Modern Controversy	Continues to be revered by traditionalists but heavily criticized by reformers	Ongoing debates on caste, social justice, and the role of religious texts in a secular democracy

Table 5 explores the enduring effects of caste hierarchy and associated practices within Hinduism. The historical caste system has shaped modern social inequality and discrimination. Observations suggest that the formalization of the varna system has profoundly influenced social norms and religious customs. Our research indicates that hereditary occupations and caste-based discrimination have been entrenched through historical religious and legal systems. A comparison between pre-colonial and colonial eras reveals that caste distinctions became more pronounced under British rule. There is a strong link between the codification of Hindu law by colonial authorities and the exacerbation of social divisions. The interpretation of these results implies that caste hierarchy has been pivotal in forming societal structures and norms. The rationale for the persistence of strict social boundaries can be traced to the association of caste and duty with birth. It is believed that anti-caste movements have played a significant role in the ongoing discussions on caste and social justice. Supporting evidence includes historical records, legal documents, and contemporary reports of caste-based discrimination. Caution is advised when applying these findings to all regions and communities within India.

Table 6 analyzing Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's role in challenging the caste system and advocating for marginalized groups in India

Aspect	Contribution by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar	Impact
Critique of Manusmriti	Publicly burned the Manusmriti in 1927 during the Mahad Satyagraha to protest its caste-based teachings.	Sparked national debate; symbolically rejected caste-based Hindu orthodoxy.
Advocacy for Dalit Rights	Led movements like Temple Entry, Mahad Water Satyagraha, and campaigned for equal rights for Dalits (then called "Untouchables").	Raised awareness, mobilized Dalit identity, and demanded social inclusion.
Political Representation	Fought for separate electorates for Dalits in the 1932 Poona Pact negotiations.	Secured reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in legislatures, a step toward political empowerment.
Architect of the Indian Constitution	As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, ensured the Constitution included equality, abolition of untouchability, and affirmative action.	Laid the legal foundation for social justice and equal rights in independent India.
Social Reforms	Promoted education and social upliftment among marginalized communities; emphasized self-respect and dignity.	Inspired generations of Dalit intellectuals, leaders, and activists.
Religious Conversion	Converted to Buddhism in 1956 along with millions of followers, rejecting Hinduism's caste hierarchy.	Marked a powerful shift in identity and a break from caste oppression; launched Dalit Buddhist movement.
Legacy and Influence	Writings like <i>Annihilation of Caste</i> continue to influence anti-caste movements and social justice activism in India.	Revered as a symbol of resistance; his ideas are foundational to modern Indian democracy and social equality.

Table 6 examines Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's diverse contributions to opposing the caste system and advocating for India's marginalized populations. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's actions and beliefs imparts a prime role in breaking down the caste system and empowering marginalized groups in India. Observations suggest that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's criticism of Manusmriti and

his support for Dalit rights were key events in the anti-caste movement. The findings indicate that Ambedkar's efforts in political representation, especially the Poona Pact, were vital in securing legislative seats for Scheduled Castes, thus promoting political empowerment. A comparison of Ambedkar's social reforms and religious conversion underscores the profound effect of his strategies on Dalit identity and social inclusion. There is a strong link between Ambedkar's educational and social upliftment initiatives and the emergence of Dalit intellectuals and leaders. The interpretation of Ambedkar's legacy implies that his writings, such as *Annihilation of Caste*, continue to resonate and shape modern anti-caste movements. Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism was motivated by a desire to reject the caste hierarchy inherent in Hinduism and to foster a new identity for Dalits. Speculation about the lasting impact of Ambedkar's actions suggests that his efforts laid the foundation for ongoing social justice and equality movements in India. Historical records and Ambedkar's own writings provide evidence of his transformative role in challenging caste-based discrimination. Caution is advised when generalizing the impact of Ambedkar's actions, as India's socio-political context has evolved since his era.

Table 7 Constitutional Provisions and their impact on equality in India

Aspect	Constitutional Provision	Impact on Promoting Equality
Fundamental Rights	Article 14: Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws for all citizens.	Established the principle of legal equality as the cornerstone of Indian democracy.
Prohibition of Discrimination	Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, caste, sex, religion, or place of birth.	Strengthened social justice and set the legal basis to challenge caste and gender-based discrimination.
Abolition of Untouchability	Article 17: Eradicates untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.	Provided a direct legal attack on caste-based exclusion; led to protective legislation like the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955).
Equality of Opportunity	Article 16: Guarantees equal opportunity in public employment.	Helped marginalized groups enter public services and government employment.
Affirmative Action (Reservations)	Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 46: Allow special supplies for the progress of socially and educationally backward classes.	Enabled reservations in education, jobs, and legislatures for SCs, STs, and OBCs, promoting inclusion and representation.
Directive Principles of State Policy	Encourage the state to promote social and economic equality (Articles 38, 39, 46).	Influenced welfare programs, land reforms, and educational policies aimed at reducing inequality.
Constitutional Bodies	Institutions like the National Commission for SCs/STs, National Human Rights Commission, etc.	Provided institutional support to safeguard the rights of vulnerable communities.
Judicial Activism	Courts have interpreted equality expansively through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and progressive judgments.	Strengthened democratic rights; led to landmark rulings supporting gender rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and anti-caste reforms.

Table 7 examines how constitutional provisions have influenced the advancement of equality in India. Certain constitutional articles have been instrumental in fostering equality within the country. Our analysis shows that Articles 14, 15, 17, and 16 have been pivotal in establishing legal equality and addressing discrimination. The research indicates that these constitutional measures have prompted significant social and legal changes, such as the eradication of untouchability and the implementation of affirmative action policies. When evaluating the effectiveness of various articles, Article 17 is particularly notable for its direct challenge to caste-based exclusion. There is a notable link between the enforcement of Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 46 and the increased presence of marginalized communities in education and public sector jobs. These findings suggest that constitutional provisions are essential for advancing social justice and equality. The rationale is that legal structures provide the necessary groundwork for confronting and eliminating discriminatory practices. It is hypothesized that, in the absence of these constitutional protections, progress toward social equality would have been considerably slower.

Supporting evidence includes statistical data showing higher enrollment and employment rates among SCs, STs, and OBCs following the adoption of affirmative action measures. However, it is important to be cautious in attributing all advancements solely to constitutional provisions, as other socio-political factors also contribute.

Table 8 Analysis that investigates the disconnect between the constitutional principles of equality and actual societal practices, particularly in the treatment of Shudras (and Dalits) and women in post-independence India:

Aspect	Constitutional Principle	Societal Practice	Nature of Disconnect
Equality Before Law	Article 14: Guarantees equality before the law.	Caste-based discrimination, violence, and exclusion persist, especially in rural areas.	Legal equality exists, but caste hierarchies still influence policing, access to justice, and daily life.
Abolition of Untouchability	Article 17: Abolishes untouchability in all forms.	Manual scavenging, segregation, and untouchability still practiced in many parts of India.	Despite being illegal, deep-rooted caste bias sustains discriminatory customs and social exclusion.
Non-discrimination on Caste and Gender	Article 15: Prohibits discrimination based on caste or sex.	Women and Shudras often face barriers in education, employment, and social mobility .	Structural inequalities undermine constitutional ideals; enforcement is weak or inconsistent.
Equal Opportunity in Employment	Article 16: Guarantees equal opportunity in public employment.	Bias in hiring , especially in private sector; tokenism in public sector reservations.	Marginalized groups often lack access to quality education or networks to fully benefit from these provisions.
Dignity of the Individual	Preamble & Article 21: Promotes dignity of all individuals.	Caste-based slurs, honor killings, and sexual violence against Dalit women still occur.	Cultural norms and social prejudices often violate individual dignity despite constitutional protections.
Protection and Empowerment of Women	Articles 15(3), 39, 42, etc. allow for special provisions for women.	Women still face gender-based violence, wage gaps, and lack of representation in politics.	Patriarchy remains entrenched; legal provisions are often undermined by social conservatism and weak justice .
Education and Awareness	Article 46: State to promote education of SCs/STs and weaker sections.	Dropout rates among Dalits and girls remain high; access to quality education is unequal.	Economic and social barriers hinder the implementation of educational equality.

Table 8 examines the gap between the constitutional ideals of equality and the actual societal practices in India after gaining independence, with a focus on the treatment of Shudras (and Dalits) and women. The primary research question explores the reasons why the constitutional promises of equality, non-discrimination, and dignity do not materialize for marginalized groups in India. Our findings suggest that, despite a legal framework intended to ensure equality, caste-based discrimination and gender bias remain prevalent in various facets of Indian society. The results highlight a considerable disparity between constitutional ideals and the real-life experiences of Shudras and women, emphasizing ongoing discrimination and violence. Comparing constitutional provisions with societal practices reveals that legal equality does not automatically lead to social equality. There is a strong link between ingrained cultural norms and the continuation of discriminatory practices against marginalized groups. Our analysis of the data indicates that deep-seated social prejudices and structural inequalities weaken the effectiveness of constitutional protections. The persistence of discrimination is rooted in the historical and cultural context that upholds caste hierarchies and patriarchal values. We suggest that without significant social reform and stronger enforcement of laws, the gap between constitutional principles and societal practices will continue. Supporting data from various case studies and statistical analyses highlight the widespread nature of caste-based violence and gender discrimination. Caution is advised in generalizing the findings, as the extent of the disconnect may differ across various regions and communities in India.

Table 9 Assessment of Legal Reforms vs. Social Realities

Area of Reform	Legal Intervention	Intended Outcome	Effectiveness	Limitations
Abolition of Untouchability	Article 17; Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955); SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989)	Eliminate caste-based discrimination and violence	Partially effective: Legal deterrents exist, but caste violence and untouchability persist, especially in rural areas.	Weak enforcement, social acceptance of caste hierarchy, police/judicial bias.
Women's Rights and Protection	Dowry Prohibition Act (1961); Domestic Violence Act (2005); Sexual Harassment Act (2013)	Promote gender equality, safety, and dignity	Mixed impact: Improved legal recourse and awareness, but high rates of violence and low reporting continue.	Patriarchal norms, victim blaming, poor implementation at local level.
Reservation Policies (SC/ST/OBC)	Constitution Articles 15(4), 16(4); Mandal Commission implementation	Upliftment of socially and educationally backward classes through affirmative action	Significant in increasing representation in education and public jobs.	Resentment from upper castes; limited impact in private sector and rural upliftment.
Temple Entry and Social Access	Various state laws post-independence; constitutional protection under Articles 15 and 25	Ensure access to religious spaces for all	Legally allowed, but social resistance and symbolic denial still occurs (e.g., Dalit temple bans).	Dominant caste control over religious institutions; lack of local enforcement.
Marriage and Family Laws	Hindu Marriage Act (1955); Special Marriage Act (1954); Child Marriage Prohibition Act (2006)	Promote inter-caste marriages, ban child marriage, empower women's rights in marriage	Progressive laws on paper, but honor killings and caste backlash often follow inter-caste unions.	Social stigma, community backlash, limited protection for couples.
Education Reforms	Right to Education Act (2009); scholarships and hostels for marginalized groups	Equal educational opportunities for all	Improved access, especially for Dalits and girls, but quality gaps and dropout rates remain high.	Poor infrastructure, caste/gender bias in classrooms, economic pressure on families.
LGBTQ+ Rights (Recent)	Decriminalization of Section 377 (2018); recognition of transgender rights (Nalsa judgment, 2014)	End legal discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation	Major legal victories, but social stigma and violence remain widespread.	Social attitudes lag behind; inadequate legal protections in employment, housing, marriage rights.

Table 9 examines how effectively legal reforms address social issues related to caste discrimination, gender inequality, and affirmative action in India. It compares the impact of legal measures with social realities in terms of reducing caste-based

discrimination, advancing gender equality, and supporting marginalized groups. Our findings reveal that, despite strong legal frameworks, practices like untouchability, gender violence, and caste-based exclusion persist. The results indicate that although legal reforms have led to significant changes, their effectiveness is often hindered by poor enforcement and entrenched social norms. An analysis of various reform areas shows differing levels of success, with reservation policies yielding more concrete outcomes in education and employment compared to other reforms. There is a clear link between the success of legal interventions and the degree of social acceptance and enforcement at the local level. These findings highlight the complexity of converting legal provisions into social change, emphasizing the influence of societal attitudes and institutional biases. The partial success of these reforms can be attributed to deeply rooted hierarchical structures and resistance from dominant social groups. It is suggested that greater community involvement and awareness initiatives could potentially improve the effectiveness of these legal measures. Data from government reports and independent studies support the observed trends and highlight the challenges in implementing these reforms. Caution is advised in generalizing the results, as regional differences and local socio-economic conditions can significantly affect the outcomes.

Table 10 Comparison: Indian Constitution vs. Manusmriti

Theme/Aspect	Indian Constitution	Manusmriti	Key Contrast
Equality	Guarantees equality before the law (Article 14); prohibits discrimination on caste, religion, sex, etc.	Advocates caste hierarchy, with Brahmins at the top and Shudras and women as subordinates.	Constitution promotes egalitarianism, Manusmriti upholds inequality.
Caste System	Abolishes untouchability (Article 17); promotes affirmative action for SC/ST/OBC.	Divides society into rigid varna system: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra; promotes exclusion.	Constitution aims to dismantle caste barriers, Manusmriti institutionalizes them.
Social Mobility	Advocates equal opportunity in education and employment (Article 16).	Prohibits upward mobility; birth determines social and professional roles.	Constitution enables social advancement, Manusmriti denies it.
Women's Rights	Guarantees gender equality (Articles 14, 15); supports women's education, property, and political rights.	Considers women inferior, restricts freedom, access to education, and property rights.	Constitution ensures women's empowerment, Manusmriti supports patriarchal control.
Religious Freedom	Ensures freedom of religion and belief (Article 25); promotes secularism.	Based on Hindu religious law; enforces social duties rooted in Vedic norms.	Constitution is secular, Manusmriti is theocratic.
Justice System	Modern secular legal framework with due process and equality before law.	Justice system based on varna dharma and differential punishments based on caste.	Constitution promotes uniform justice, Manusmriti supports graded punishment.
Labor and Occupation	Freedom to choose any profession or trade (Article 19).	Occupation strictly tied to caste birth (e.g., Shudras must serve higher castes).	Constitution provides freedom, Manusmriti restricts personal and economic choices.
Democracy vs. Hierarchy	Based on democracy, universal adult franchise, and rule of law.	Upholds a rigidly stratified society based on ritual purity.	Constitution empowers every citizen equally, Manusmriti validates social hierarchy.

In table 10 A comparative study examines the Indian Constitution and Manusmriti, focusing on their principles and effects on equality, social hierarchy, and individual rights. The Indian Constitution and Manusmriti take different stances on social

equality, the caste system, and personal freedoms. Our analysis shows notable differences between the Indian Constitution's egalitarian values and the hierarchical norms supported by Manusmriti. The results indicate that the Indian Constitution advocates for social justice and equality, whereas Manusmriti supports caste-based discrimination and social stratification. A thorough comparison of the two texts reveals that the Indian Constitution seeks to break down caste barriers and promote gender equality, contrasting sharply with Manusmriti's reinforcement of social hierarchy and patriarchal dominance. The link between the Indian Constitution's principles and India's socio-political development suggests a positive effect on social mobility and individual rights, while Manusmriti's influence is associated with historical social rigidity. These findings suggest that the Indian Constitution's egalitarian framework has played a significant role in social reforms, unlike the regressive norms of Manusmriti. The observed differences can be attributed to the Indian Constitution's progressive and inclusive vision, as opposed to Manusmriti's traditional and exclusionary ethos. It is speculated that continued adherence to Manusmriti's principles could impede social progress and equality in modern Indian society. Supporting evidence from legislative reforms and social indicators confirms the positive impact of the Indian Constitution in promoting equality and dismantling caste barriers. Caution is advised when interpreting these texts, as Manusmriti reflects historical context and cultural norms that may not align with contemporary values.

Study Significance

The importance of this research lies in its thorough investigation of the historical and legal aspects of social hierarchy and gender bias in India. By illuminating the foundational influence of ancient texts such as the Manusmriti and exploring the entrenched nature of caste-based disparities, the study provides essential insights into the origins and persistence of systemic discrimination. It also underscores the transformative effects of legal and constitutional reforms, particularly through the efforts of B.R. Ambedkar, in advancing social equality and empowering marginalized groups. Additionally, this research offers a framework for understanding modern social justice movements and their historical roots. Crucially, the study has the potential to guide policy-making and educational practices by identifying gaps in the enforcement of constitutional guarantees and emphasizing the ongoing necessity for targeted interventions to achieve the principles of equality and social justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

Application/Implication

The implications of this research are far-reaching, affecting legal, social, and policy-making domains. By uncovering the historical roots of systemic inequality, especially regarding caste and gender discrimination, it provides valuable insights for contemporary discussions on social justice and equality. The study underscores the enduring relevance of Ambedkar's ideas and the changes to Hindu personal laws during British colonial rule, offering a comprehensive understanding of how historical contexts shape current legal systems. These insights aid current efforts toward caste reform, social equity, and the effective enforcement of constitutional protections. Furthermore, the research calls for stronger community-based strategies and effective implementation mechanisms to bridge the gap between legal guarantees and social realities. The study's findings also have comparative importance, suggesting that similar constitutional frameworks could benefit other democracies grappling with social inequality. Ultimately, this work supports ongoing advocacy, policy reform, and educational strategies aimed at upholding the fundamental values of justice, equality, and dignity in Indian society and beyond.

5. LIMITATION

This study faces a significant limitation due to its dependence on textual analysis, historical records, and secondary data sources, which may not adequately reflect the lived experiences of Shudras, women, and other marginalized groups. Although these sources provide important insights into legal and historical contexts, they often fail to capture the subtle realities, societal practices, and grassroots-level changes that have shaped and continue to affect caste and gender dynamics in India. Furthermore, the lack of primary field research restricts the depth of understanding regarding the practical application of legal reforms, local enforcement, and current societal attitudes. Consequently, this study may not fully represent the complexities of both ancient and modern experiences, especially concerning Ambedkar's legacy and the development of anti-caste movements.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Manusmriti upheld a strict hierarchy based on caste and gender, whereas Ambedkar's Constitution dismantled this system by embedding principles of equality, dignity, and justice for everyone. The Constitution not only eradicated untouchability but also introduced affirmative action to support marginalized groups. Ambedkar's vision continues to influence contemporary India, challenging centuries of discrimination perpetuated by ancient legal codes.

Future research can delve into various critical and evolving areas. A key direction involves conducting a comparative legal analysis to trace how the principles in the Manusmriti have been contested or replaced by modern constitutional provisions, particularly following post-independence reforms. This historical approach can reveal both advancements and ongoing challenges. Additionally, examining the intersection of caste with other identities like gender, class, and religion is crucial

for understanding the complex nature of discrimination. While the law may address caste inequalities, it often falls short in addressing multiple forms of marginalization. Research could also focus on the grassroots impact of these legal reforms, especially in rural and tribal areas, to assess whether they are being effectively implemented and benefiting the communities they aim to serve.

Another important area is the influence of social movements—particularly Dalit, feminist, and human rights campaigns—on legal reforms. Analyzing this interaction can offer insights into how change is negotiated through activism. Closely related is the need to examine judicial interpretations of key constitutional provisions like Article 15, through landmark judgments that either support or resist progressive change. Furthermore, exploring how educational institutions engage with the legacy of Manusmriti and caste-based discrimination is worthwhile. Research can evaluate whether curricula critically address oppressive histories or contribute to their erasure. A comparative global perspective can also enhance the discourse by examining how other countries, such as South Africa or the United States, have tackled institutionalized discrimination. Lastly, with the rise of digital platforms, future research must investigate how caste-based bias appears in online spaces and whether legal reforms are adapting to address discrimination in these new domains.

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