

The Ascendancy of Ambedkarite Social Justice Philosophy Among the Youth of South Assam, India: A Study on the Disjuncture between Conceptual Awareness and Grassroots Praxis

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Though there is a plethora of discussion among scholars about Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice, the reception of this philosophy among the youth of Northeast India, especially the geographically and linguistically distinct region of South Assam (Barak Valley), remains a topic of investigation. This paper tries to explore the understanding and practice of Ambedkarism among 500 graduate students of South Assam. The quantitative data reveals that the level of awareness of Ambedkarite ideology among students is high, with 84.6% of students aware of Ambedkar as a social reformer and 96.6% of students aware of Ambedkar's mission of achieving social justice. The research also reveals an important phenomenon of "Implementation Gap," where 56.8% of students are not aware of social organizations in their region. The research also reveals another phenomenon of "Domain Paradox," where students hold the public domain of education and society to be meritocratic and egalitarian but hold the private domain of kinship and marital relations to be rigidly stratified by caste. This change in the domain of students, from a focus on collective mobilization to internalized meritocracy, has serious consequences for the future of Ambedkarite movements in the region. The research concludes with some recommendations to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Keywords: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, social justice philosophy, domain paradox, internalized meritocracy, conceptual awareness

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1. Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, affectionately referred to as 'Babasaheb,' is a well-known Indian jurist, economist, academician, and social leader who struggled for social justice and equality and was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1990. His philosophy of annihilation of castes, constitutional morality, and empowerment of the socially disadvantaged through education has become a benchmark in Indian society. However, the reception and applicability of Ambedkarite thought among the youth of Northeast India—particularly in South Assam (Barak Valley)—remains critically understudied.

South Assam is located on the banks of the River 'Barak' of Assam, India and thus popularly known as 'Barak Valley'. The Valley consists of three districts, viz., Cachar, Hailakandi, and Sribhumi, with numerically dominant Bengali Caste population. This region is quite underdeveloped compared to the rest of Assam in terms of overall industrialization. The sociological context of this particular region is special, considering the context of Partition, the double marginality of Bengali-speaking Scheduled Castes, and the lack of a strong Dalit movement.

The following research questions were used for this research:

- What is the nature of foundational knowledge among graduate youth in South Assam regarding Ambedkar's philosophy, particularly regarding his perspectives on the caste system and education?
- How do youth in South Assam perceive various aspects of social inequality, such as marriage based on caste and economic inequality?
- To what extent has Ambedkarism influenced social structures, legal systems, and government policies in South Assam?
- How do youth in South Assam assess the efficiency of political leaders, Dalit organizations, and NGOs operating in South Assam?
- What are the systemic barriers to realizing Ambedkar's philosophy in practice?
- What measures according to youth in South Assam can bring long-term social equality to society?

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main aim is to evaluate the impact of Ambedkar ideology on graduate youth in South Assam and its application, focusing on:

- evaluation of philosophical awareness;
- exploration of perceptions of social inequality; and
- identification of challenges to implementation of social justice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Regional Context: Displacement and Identity in South Assam

Though the economic condition of Scheduled Castes is a well-explored domain, regional variations have not been sufficiently researched. Bosé (1994) emphasized the role of occupational restrictions and access to resources in the marginalization of the SCs. Sutradhar (2019) also emphasized the socio-economic disparities between the SCs of Southern India and Bengali-ethnic SCs of Assam. The history of SC communities in South Assam is deeply intertwined with Partition and subsequent migration (Butalia, 1998; Choudhury, 2021; Mallick & Das, 2012; Roy, 2018). Chakraborty's (2022) research on South Assam reveals a "curious flux" where Scheduled Castes like the Kaibartas and Namasudras moved from their "agrarian selves" in Sylhet to their "refugee selves" in Assam—a historical experience crucial to assessing contemporary social justice consciousness.

2.2 The Conceptual Shift: 'Internalized Meritocracy' and Identity Fatigue

In this context, Bhat & Shamim (2025), in their sociological background for "identity fatigue," state, "In the social world, the 'General Category' has emerged as a 'Merit-Based' and 'Caste-Less' space, while 'Reserved Categories' are now viewed as 'Caste-Burdened.'" This is reflected in the 31.6% of youth in South Assam who prefer 'Intellectual Empowerment' to reservations to avoid social stigmas.

2.3 The Implementation Gap: Symbolic vs. Substantive Democracy

There is a critical tension between conceptual awareness and social integration.

Tandon (2025) suggests that "social justice is now moving from symbolic representation to substantive participation." This is evident in the results from South Assam, where youth have high conceptual awareness about Ambedkar's educational ideals (87.6%) but fail to participate at the grassroots level. In the concept of "Social Space" developed by Gopal Guru (2012), it is evident that while it is possible to gain entry to a university, it does not automatically eliminate the invisible, rigid structures that govern caste, especially marriage, among educated youth.

2.4 Ambedkarism as a Tool for Psychological Recovery

Dharavath (2025) states that Ambedkarite philosophy works as a 'Counter-Memory' for the people of Northeast India, through which the youth can counter Brahmanical cultural hegemony and form their identity. In the absence of Dalit organizations, this philosophy can work as a means of 'psychological retrieval of identity' for graduate youth.

2.5 International Theoretical Perspectives

According to Bourdieu (1986), universities are not so much sites but rather "fields in which dominant groups legitimize their dominance—echoing the result that 40.8% of respondents agree that 'the education system is fully equal.' The shift in individualist meritocracy among youth in South Assam echoes Bonilla-Silva's (2006) notion of 'colourblind racism,' as well as Seekings & Natrass's (2005) finding that in post-apartheid South Africa, among its black middle class, careerism takes precedence over political activism. As per the hegemonic understanding of 'Implementation Gap' via Mannheim (1936) and Gramsci (1971), it may be noted that while meritocracy naturalizes extant hierarchies, Ambedkar's 'agitational legacy' is erased in state school syllabi, and there is no 'robust organizational networks' (McAdam et al., 2001) to channel icon worship into activism.

2.6 Research Gap and the Contribution of this Study

Existing literature has documented displacement histories in South Assam and national reservation policy debates. However, significant lacunae remain: (i) the "dual marginality" of Bengali-speaking SCs in South Assam—subjected to both linguistic and caste peripheralization—is overlooked;

(ii) the disjuncture between admiration for Ambedkar and action in his name is unstudied in this regional context; and (iii) most existing research focuses on institutional policies rather than the emerging psychological phenomena of "Internalized Meritocracy" and "Identity Fatigue" among graduate students.

This paper addresses these gaps through a study of 500 graduate youths, investigating the "Implementation Gap" and "Domain Paradox" of Ambedkarite activism in South Assam.

3. Methodology

This research utilized a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design that incorporated quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative thematic analysis. The target population of this research comprised 500 graduate youths between 21-24 years of age, at present studying in Social Science departments of Assam University, Silchar, at the PG level. The stratified random sampling design ensured representation of the target population based on their social identity: General (51.2%), OBC (26.4%), SC (14.6%), and ST (7.8%), and gender: male (52.6%) and female (47.4%).

Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire based on five thematic parameters: (i) Conceptual Awareness, (ii) Perceptions of Regional Inequality, (iii) Impact on Local Social Structures, (iv) Youth Perspectives on Social Justice, and (v) Challenges and Opportunities. The questionnaire has been piloted, and inter-rater reliability has been established. Complementarily, thematic discussions were conducted among participants, and document analysis of local policy documents and reports has been conducted to contextualize primary data collected. Quantitative data has been processed through SPSS software using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation to identify the "Domain Paradox," and thematic coding to generate qualitative data. The limitations of this research include the fact that data collected may not represent the experiences of all youth in South Assam, as it is based on a specific academic cohort.

4. Analysis, Findings, and Observations

4.1 Conceptual Awareness

Ambedkarite social justice philosophy is embedded in the annihilation of caste hierarchies, enrooting a society based on the moral pillars of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It implies systemic empowerment of the marginalized through constitutional safeguards, education, and the relentless pursuit of human dignity.

An eight-item questionnaire assessed participants' understanding of Ambedkarite Social Justice Philosophy. The responses of the sample youths are analysed in the following table:

Table 1: Responses of the Youths for Ambedkar's Philosophy of Social Justice

Question	Option (a)	Option (b)	Option (c)	Option (d)	DK
1) Who is Dr. B.R. Ambedkar best known as?	Scientist: 02	Social Reformer: 423	Economist: 35	Politician: 29	11
2) What was Ambedkar's primary focus?	Industrial dev.: 04	Social Justice: 483	Military Reform: 05	Agri. Policies: 01	07
3) Which book critiques caste?	Discovery of India: 24	Annihilation of Caste: 458	Hind Swaraj: 03	The Guide: 02	13
4) How did Ambedkar view education?	Empowering marginalized: 28	Challenging hierarchies: 30	Social inclusion: 26	All of them: 409	07
5) How to address caste discrimination?	Education: 56	Affirmative Action: 37	Constitutional Safeguards: 25	All of them: 351	31
6) Term for oppressed caste?	Untouchables: 244	Scheduled Tribes: 53	Depressed Classes: 187	Subaltern: 07	09
7) Ambedkar on reservation policies?	Temporary measure: 102	Permanent measure: 93	Review & Revision: 132	Education as tool: 138	35
8) Which movement led by Ambedkar?	Civil Disobedience: 161	Mahad Satyagraha: 138	Quit India: 96	Non-Cooperation: 85	20

Source: Field Survey

Key findings: (i) 84.6% correctly associate Ambedkar with Social Reformer; (ii) 96.6% correctly associate Social Justice & Equality with the primary focus; (iii) 91.6% correctly associate Annihilation of Caste with the seminal work;

(iv) 81.8% correctly associate education with holistic empowerment; (v) terminological clarity is lacking, with 48.8% choosing Untouchables, while only 37.4% chose Depressed Classes; (vi) fragmentation is high, with none of the options exceeding 30% on the reservations issue; (vii) only 28% correctly chose Mahad Satyagraha, while 32.2% incorrectly chose Civil Disobedience Movement.

Observations: The survey results indicate the presence of a 'literacy gap' in the youth of South Assam. Although cultural visibility and appreciation of B.R. Ambedkar are high, the philosophy is not fully internalized but is restricted to the level of a symbolic icon. The student can easily relate to the essential slogans of the movement, such as 'Educate, Agitate, Organize,' but is not familiar with the 'scaffolding' of the philosophy that is needed to apply it in real life. The local education system emphasizes the 'Constitutional Architect' and ignores the 'Social Agitator' aspect of B.R. Ambedkar. This has resulted in the student being unable to make the connection between the principles of the 20th century and the present day. The questions related to reservation policies indicate an 'internalized meritocracy.' The student understands the importance of equality but is also influenced by the media to look upon reservation policies as 'uncool' and 'shameful.' The lack of knowledge of specific historical events, such as the Mahad Satyagraha, points to the absence of a local Dalit movement in Assam to preserve the tradition of 'direct action.'

The Ambedkarite thought in the region has gained visibility without the aid of literacy. However, the challenge that the future engagement must address is how to "move beyond the production of 'admiration' and towards the production of 'critical, action-oriented understanding.'

Reasons for knowledge gap: Qualitative discussions identified four systemic reasons for this knowledge gap. First, formal schooling provided only a selective understanding—Ambedkar as "constitutional architect" but not as "active social agitator": *"We read about him in civics. He wrote the Constitution—that is basically what the chapter said. I did not even know about Mahad until I saw a post on Instagram last year."* (a male participant, AUS). Second, the "Digital Filter Bubble" results in slogan-literacy rather than intellectual engagement:

"Everything I know about Ambedkar I learned from reels and infographics. I know the slogans but not the arguments." (a female participant, AUS). Third, the unique socio-political setting of South Assam frames rights primarily through ethnic and linguistic—not caste—frameworks: "Here, when people talk about rights, they mean tribal rights or linguistic minority rights. Caste feels like someone else's problem." (a male participant, AUS). Fourth, theory-practice discrepancy makes modern discrimination invisible: "The discrimination today is not someone telling you to leave. It is who gets called back for the job, who gets the room on rent. We experience it but we cannot name it legally because no one has taught us." (a female participant, AUS).

4.2 Perceptions of Regional Inequality

While Northeast India is generally perceived as "caste-free" due to its tribal composition, the Scheduled Castes of South Assam illustrate complex double marginalization through prevailing linguistic and ethnic conflicts.

Table 2 presents a snapshot of the youth's perspectives, as obtained from the study participants.

Table 2: Response of the Sampled Youths for Their Perceptions of Social Inequality in South Assam

Question	Option (a)	Option (b)	Option (c)	Option (d)	DK
1) Caste discrimination in Barak Valley?	Yes, strongly: 99	Yes, somewhat: 294	Not at all: 15	Not sure: 83	09
2) Primary cause of inequality?	Caste: 131	Gender: 22	Economic status: 235	Religion: 90	22
3) Most vulnerable group?	Women: 52	Lower castes: 71	Migrants: 99	All of them: 256	22
4) Equal access to education?	Fully equal: 204	Mostly equal: 112	Partially: 101	Not equal: 78	05
5) Economic discrimination?	Frequently: 177	Occasionally: 185	Rarely: 114	Never: 11	13
6) Caste influence on marriage?	Yes, significantly: 289	Yes, somewhat: 209	Rarely: 39	Never: 08	05
7) Barriers to public spaces?	Often: 58	Occasionally: 141	Rarely: 177	Not at all: 121	03
8) Social justice movements active?	Very active: 56	Somewhat active: 211	Not active: 84	Not aware: 133	16

Source: Field Survey

Key findings: (i) around 79% of them are aware of the existence of caste discrimination; (ii) 47% of them point to economic status as the main reason for inequality, which is less politically sensitive than caste; (iii) 51.2% of them are aware of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities among all sections of society; (iv) 40.8% of them are of the opinion that access to education is "fully equal"; and (v) almost all of them (99.6%) acknowledge caste's influence on marriage; (vi) 60% report that physical segregation in public spaces is rare; and (vii) 42.2% perceive social justice movements as "somewhat active."

Observations: These answers indicate a "Domain Paradox," where the scaffolding of caste is seen to loosen in public life but remains load-bearing in the intimate domain. The study reveals four key dimensions of this modern friction:

1. The Cognitive Split (Economic vs. Social):

While youth use a "liberal vocabulary" to attribute inequality to class (a politically safer explanation), their near-unanimous acknowledgement of caste-based marriage proves that social structures remain unchanged. "My father said: you must marry within our community. As we belong to Brahmin caste, your mate must belong to that. Otherwise, we and our relatives will not be part of your marriage." (a female participant, AUS). Economic framing acts as a coping mechanism, allowing for a belief in meritocracy without confronting the social cost of caste exclusion.

2. The Illusion of Educational Equality:

High optimism regarding educational access reflects physical entry rather than social equity. While students occupy the same classrooms, informal hierarchies (peer networks and faculty attention) persist: "In college, nobody asked me about my surname. It was about marks, about who could get through the exam. I topped my district. That felt like the world had changed." (a male participant, AUS). This "educational optimism" can inadvertently legitimize broader systemic inequalities by masking internal discrimination.

3. The Mutation of Discrimination:

Discrimination has shifted from overt exclusion (segregation) to structural disadvantage (hiring bias and informal networking). "When I went to rent a house near the market, the landlord said it was taken. My upper-caste friend went the next day—the house was suddenly available. What you call that? It is not untouchability." But it is something."

(a male participant, AUS). This transformation—from "untouchability" to invisible structural disadvantage—makes discrimination harder to contest legally and represents a new strategic challenge for Ambedkarite movements. This "invisible" discrimination leaves no paper trail, making it harder to contest legally and presenting a new strategic challenge for traditional social justice movements.

4. Intuitive Intersectionality: Students demonstrate a sophisticated understanding that caste, gender, and displacement are mutually reinforcing rather than additive. While this creates potential for broad-based coalitions, there is a significant gap between personal awareness of discrimination and knowledge of organized resistance.

Thus, modernity has reached the "gate" of the South Assam household but has not been admitted. Because caste reproduction occurs within the private sphere of kinship rather than the public sphere of the classroom, education alone is insufficient to dissolve these entrenched hierarchies.

4.3 Impact of Ambedkarite Ideas on the Local Social Structure

The concepts of Ambedkarites have completely reshaped the social structure in Indian villages by challenging the caste-based social hierarchy, with the foundation of liberty, equality, and fraternity, creating a movement that replaced submission based on birth with a sense of politics in Indian society.

To understand the impact of Ambedkarite thoughts on the social setup of South Assam, the responses of the sample youths are analysed in the following Table 3.

Table 3: Response of the Youths for Impact of Ambedkarite Ideas on Local Social Structure

Question	Option (a)	Option (b)	Option (c)	Option (d)	DK
1) Ambedkar's philosophy influenced local laws?	Yes, significantly: 230	Yes, slightly: 174	No impact: 28	Not sure: 65	03
2) Changes reflecting Ambedkar's vision?	More representation: 39	Better education access: 110	Caste reservation: 97	All of them: 243	11
3) Local leaders invoke Ambedkar's ideals?	Frequently: 78	Occasionally: 239	Rarely: 142	Never: 30	11
4) Dalit-focused organizations active?	Yes, many: 18	Yes, a few: 122	None: 69	Not aware: 284	07
5) Main challenge in implementing ideals?	Lack of awareness: 159	Upper-caste resistance: 41	Govt. inaction: 33	All of them: 252	15
6) Reservations implemented effectively?	Fully: 307	Partially: 146	Poorly: 33	Not at all: 07	07
7) Effect on inter-caste relations?	Strengthened bonds: 156	Reduced tensions: 182	No effect: 88	Increased tension: 44	30
8) Students learn about Ambedkar in schools?	Yes, extensively: 107	Yes, briefly: 359	Not at all: 11	Not sure: 13	10
9) Govt. schemes influenced by Ambedkar?	Yes, many: 166	Yes, a few: 245	None: 13	Not aware: 71	05
10) Group benefiting most from Ambedkar's ideals?	Women: 85	Dalits: 299	Religious minorities: 50	Economically weak: 101	13

Source: Field Survey

Key findings: (i) 80.8% believe that philosophy is reflected in local laws; (ii) 61.4% believe reservations are "fully" implemented; (iii) only 71.8% believe that Ambedkar is taught "briefly" in school, while 21.4% believe it is taught "extensively"; (iv) 56.8% are "not aware" of any Dalit-specific organization in the Barak Valley; (v) 59.8% believe that Dalits as the primary beneficiaries of Ambedkar's ideas.

Observation: The findings highlight a tension between two institutional logics: top-down state delivery, which successfully codified Ambedkarite norms, bottom-up civil society mobilization, which remains weak in South Assam. This divergence is the region's defining structural feature.

1. Between Ideological and Institutional Impact: Reservations and safeguards were granted from above as a legislative settlement, rather than through the mass mobilization seen elsewhere. In South Assam, this was further weakened by regional displacement and the lack of a Dalit movement to enforce implementation. Consequently, the community is institutionally included but organizationally inert—policy beneficiaries who are not agents of change.

2. Symbolism in Leadership: Local leaders' event-driven invocation of Ambedkar exemplifies "commemorative politics"—a culture where iconic figures are mobilized as symbols for elections and Jayanti celebrations, then retired. This reduces Ambedkar from a living intellectual framework to a branding device. When leaders invoke him selectively, they highlight inclusion and reservation while suppressing his anti-caste critique, Buddhist conversion, and constitutional morality. Consequently, youth who encounter Ambedkar through political channels inherit a truncated version of his thought.

3. Social Harmony and Tensions: The perception that Ambedkarite philosophy reduces inter-caste tensions—rather than intensifying them—is noteworthy, especially given national anti-reservation conflicts. In South Assam, this equanimity likely stems from two factors: the lack of organized upper-caste backlash (as caste is often secondary to ethnic and linguistic identities) and the pursuit of Ambedkarite goals through institutional channels rather than protest. This finding is double-edged: while social harmony is valuable, the absence of agitation may signal the normalization of inequality rather than its resolution.

4. Comprehensive Vision: The strong preference for 'All of them' regarding Ambedkar's vision shows youth understand his project as systemic rather than sectoral. This is significant: they do not reduce Ambedkarism to a single policy like reservations, but grasp it as an interlocking programme of representation, education, and legal protection. The practical challenge is that systemic change demands sustained organizational effort—a capacity currently lacking in this region.

Thus, Section 4.3 portrays a movement that has achieved normative diffusion but failed at organizational reproduction.

While Ambedkar's ideas permeate law, policy, and social attitudes, the movement required to defend these gains remains embryonic. Beyond a leadership shortage, this reflects South Assam's structural conditions—where displacement, linguistic marginalization, and ethnic politics have inhibited the autonomous Dalit civil society found in Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu. Recognizing this structural reality shifts the focus: the gap is not one of ideology, but of infrastructure.

4.4 Youth Perspectives on Social Justice

Contemporary society is witnessing a multitude of efforts to achieve social justice, driven by growing awareness of inequalities and the quest for fair treatment for all. To comprehend youths' attitudes toward movements for social justice in contemporary South Assam, the following table has been prepared based on a structured questionnaire completed by them. The responses of the students have been analysed in the following tabular form:

Table 4: Response of the Youths for Social Justice in Contemporary Society

Question	Option (a)	Option (b)	Option (c)	Option (d)	DK
1) Social justice movements active in South Assam?	Yes, widespread: 54	Localized: 181	Dormant: 43	Not aware: 215	07
2) Govt. initiatives focus on caste equality?	Highly focused: 98	Somewhat focused: 280	Rarely: 89	Not at all: 22	11
3) Younger generation in social justice?	Highly: 200	Moderately: 214	Rarely: 61	Indifferent: 16	09
4) Main barrier to equality?	Lack of education: 71	Cultural resistance: 31	Economic disparity: 33	All of the above: 360	05
5) Role of NGOs in social justice?	Significant: 295	Minor: 128	No role: 20	Not aware: 50	07
6) Religion's impact on equality?	Positive: 181	Negative: 96	Neutral: 174	Not related: 31	16
7) Media helping social justice?	Yes, significantly: 140	Yes, somewhat: 230	No impact: 76	Not sure: 46	08
8) Most effective awareness method?	Educational campaigns: 318	Protests: 20	Social media: 131	Religious institutions: 20	11
9) Political parties focus on equality?	Consistently: 46	Sometimes: 286	Rarely: 128	Never: 44	16
10) What's needed to strengthen social justice?	More awareness: 57	Effective policies: 41	Strong comm.: 25	All of them: 372	05

Source: Field Survey

Key findings: (i) 43% of youth are "not aware" of social justice movements, while 82.8% express high or moderate interest; (ii) 72% of youth point to a combination of obstacles—lack of education, cultural opposition, and economic inequality—as the major barrier; (iii) 59% of youth believe NGOs play a "significant role"; (iv) 63.6% of youth point to "educational campaigns" as the most effective awareness tool; (v) most respondents feel government (56%) and political parties (57.2%) are only "somewhat" focused on equality; and (vi) 74.4% agree a multi-pronged approach is necessary.

Observations: The data in Table 4 reveal a youth cohort that is analytically sophisticated about the nature of social injustice but organizationally unanchored—aware of what is wrong, uncertain how to act on that awareness through the institutions currently available to them.

1. The Awareness Gap: The coexistence of high personal interest and low awareness of local movements is not a paradox so much as a structural symptom. It indicates that the supply side of social justice activism in South Assam is critically underdeveloped: there are few organizations to be aware of. This gap has particular implications for how Ambedkarite engagement gets expressed—in the absence of visible movements, individually oriented strategies like educational attainment fill the vacuum. The result is that activist energy is redirected inward toward personal advancement rather than outward toward collective change.

2. Holistic Problem Solving: The consistent preference for composite responses ("All of the above") across both problems and solutions reflects a mode of thinking that resists the kind of single-issue framing that has historically characterized Indian social movements. Whether this breadth indicates genuine theoretical sophistication or a reluctance to commit to any particular claim is worth examining—but the direction of the finding is significant. It suggests that any effective social justice mobilization in South Assam will need to speak simultaneously to caste, gender, economic exclusion, and displacement, rather than organizing around a single axis of identity.

3. Faith in Non-Political Actors: The marked trust in NGOs and educational campaigns over political parties and religious institutions reflects a broader disillusionment with the existing channels of representation. In South Assam, this is not simply a generational trend but a rational response to the observable behavior of local politicians, who—as established in Section 4.3—invoke Ambedkar selectively and primarily for electoral purposes. The implication is that any effective mobilization will need to operate outside conventional political structures and build credibility through consistent civil society engagement rather than electoral alliance.

4. Media as a Constructive Tool: The largely positive perception of media's role in social justice is consistent with the age profile of the sample but should not be read uncritically. Digital platforms have demonstrably expanded the circulation of Ambedkarite ideas among youth—as the Section 4.1 findings on "filter bubbles" suggest—but they have also reduced those ideas to quotable fragments, severed from the analytical context that gives them force. Media is thus simultaneously the most accessible vehicle for consciousness-raising and the least reliable for building the sustained, detailed engagement that social transformation requires.

5. Localized vs. Widespread Movements: The prevalence of "localized" over "widespread" perceptions of social justice activity captures the actual organizational landscape of South Assam accurately: there are pockets of activity—welfare schemes, occasional legal clinics, commemorative events—but no regional coalition capable of aggregating these into a coherent movement. This fragmentation is both a cause and a consequence of low organizational awareness: when movements are invisible at scale, youth cannot connect their individual concerns to a shared political project, and the movement remains atomized.

In fine, Section 4.4 reveals that the youth of South Assam have the ideological ingredients for meaningful participation in social justice movements—systemic awareness, distrust of corrupt institutions, faith in education and civil society—but lack the organizational infrastructure through which those ingredients could be mobilized. The task for movement-builders is not to generate conviction but to create the connective structures that can translate existing conviction into collective action.

A media-literate, NGO-credible, educationally anchored initiative could, on this evidence, find a genuinely receptive audience.

4.5 Discussion: Challenges and Opportunities

The implementation of social justice and equality within South Assam presents a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities. To gauge local youth's perspectives, a survey comprising 10 four-option multiple-choice questions was administered. The following table provides a detailed analysis of their responses.

Table 5: Youth Perspectives on Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing Social Justice

Question	Option (a)	Option (b)	Option (c)	Option (d)	DK
1) Biggest challenge in implementing social justice?	Lack of political will: 108	Social resistance: 110	Economic inequality: 60	Lack of awareness: 213	09
2) Most effective way to promote social justice?	Education campaigns: 438	Increased quotas: 23	Protests: 18	Religious reforms: 16	05
3) Do grassroots movements reduce inequality?	Yes, significantly: 134	Yes, to some extent: 241	No, ineffective: 16	Not sure: 91	18
4) Main opportunity for social justice?	Youth engagement: 246	Inter. funding: 41	Political changes: 58	Increasing literacy: 140	15
5) Policy to address caste-based inequalities?	Strengthen affirmative action: 109	Remove reser.: 158	Anti-discrimination laws: 155	Welfare programs: 63	15
6) Access to legal aid?	Yes, always: 136	Yes, occasionally: 228	Rarely: 78	Not at all: 31	25
7) Factor hindering equal education?	Financial constraints: 152	Social discrimination: 47	Lack of infrastruc.: 28	All of them: 260	13
8) Local leaders address caste discrimination?	Yes, regularly: 26	Yes, infrequently: 216	Rarely: 155	Never: 80	23
9) Private sector's role?	Hire marginalized: 33	Promote diversity: 94	Fund social justice: 26	All of them: 325	22
10) Global movement aligning with Ambedkar?	Civil Rights Movement: 397	Green Movement: 15	Anti-Globalization: 24	Feminist Movement: 39	25

Source: Field Survey

Key findings: (i) Lack of awareness (42.6%) is the biggest impediment, followed by social resistance (22%) and lack of political will (21.6%); (ii) An overwhelming 87.6% chose education and awareness campaigns as the most effective solution; (iii) 49.2% chose youth involvement as the biggest opportunity; (iv) 75% chose grassroots movements as an effective measure to address inequality; (v) 65% chose a holistic approach by the private sector; and (vi) 79.4% chose to link Ambedkar's ideology to the global Civil Rights Movement.

Observations: The responses in Table 5 map a generation navigating a quiet ideological shift—one that is not abandoning Ambedkar's legacy but reinterpreting it through a post-reservation lens, with important consequences for how social justice is understood and pursued in South Assam.

1. Ideological vs. Practical Shift: The preference for educational campaigns over quotas, protests, or religious reform reflects how this generation conceptualizes agency. While Ambedkar's generation prioritized collective agitation and legal contest, today's youth locate transformative power in individual human capital. This shift is partly practical—education is more accessible than organized protest in South Assam—and partly ideological, reflecting a meritocratic belief that personal achievement is the most legitimate and durable form of social elevation.

2. Political Scepticism: The degree of political disillusionment evident in this section connects to the pattern identified in Section 4.3 and deserves to be read as more than passive cynicism. Youth who distrust politicians but simultaneously believe in systemic change are not apathetic—they are searching for an alternative political vehicle. The absence of such a vehicle in South Assam is a structural problem: distrust of the political class, left unaddressed, tends to deepen the retreat into individual strategies and away from the collective mobilization that structural change requires.

3. Complexity of Social Reform: The nearly equal split between removing reservations and strengthening anti-discrimination law is the section's most significant finding, precisely for what it excludes. It does not suggest youth are anti-reservation or have abandoned Ambedkarite commitments to affirmative action.

Instead, it reflects a generational encounter with the stigma attached to reserved status—what Bhat & Shamim (2025) call “identity fatigue.” These youth seek equality but question whether existing instruments serve that goal or merely perpetuate a hierarchy of “caste-burdened” versus “casteless” categories. This ambivalence, rather than a settled preference for meritocracy, is what the data reveal.

4. Aspiration for Inclusivity: The recurring preference for composite responses signals an important epistemological trait: this cohort is reluctant to reduce complex social problems to single causes or solutions. While this orientation can be generative for social movements—avoiding the sectarianism that often fragments identity-based politics—it carries a risk of diffusion. An ‘all of the above’ approach may substitute comprehensive diagnosis for the prioritization necessary for effective organizing.

Thus, Section 4.5 discloses a generation transitioning between two political grammars: neither fully committed to the collective, agitation-based grammar of classical Ambedkarism, nor captured by the individualist grammar of liberal meritocracy. This ‘in-between’ position is common in movements undergoing generational renewal and carries potential. Youth who distrust both conventional reservation politics and simple meritocracy may be most receptive to a renewed Ambedkarite framework that combines constitutional rights, civic education, and organized civil society—the very combination the policy recommendations in Section 5 seek to foster.

5. Policy Recommendations

To bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and practical reforms, the following are recommended:

1. Establish Regional Dalit Civil Society Networks: Given that 56.8% of youth are unaware of any organizations working on Dalit issues [Table 3, Q4], state and university authorities should fund Ambedkarite student societies and civil society networks to provide the “connective tissue” between individual awareness and collective action.

2. Bridge the ‘Awareness–Action’ Gap Through Applied Ambedkarite Pedagogy: Since 43% of youth are “not aware” of active social justice movements [Table 4, Q1] yet 82.8% express high or moderate interest [Table 4, Q3], universities and

NGOs should introduce curriculum modules or public seminars linking Ambedkarite thought to specific regional issues—linguistic marginalization, displacement history, and economic exclusion.

3. Expand Accessible Legal Aid Infrastructure: As 45.6% of the respondents have only “occasional” access to legal aid [Table 5, Q6], permanent Social Justice Legal Clinics must be established at Assam University, Silchar, with trained law students and practitioners to deal with anti-caste discrimination and constitutional rights counselling.

4. Reform Ambedkar’s Pedagogical Representation in School Curricula: Since 71.8% of respondents were taught about Ambedkar only “briefly” [Table 3, Q8], education boards must develop curricula extending Ambedkar’s teaching beyond his role as “Father of the Indian Constitution” to include his writings (Annihilation of Caste), his activism (Mahad Satyagraha), and his stances on reservation policy—providing the “legal acumen” that icon-based education denies students.

5. Address ‘Internalized Meritocracy’ and Identity Fatigue: NGOs and student welfare centers at Assam University can promote dialogue-based programs to critically analyze the meritocracy ideology, establish the link with the Ambedkarite movement, and promote re-identification without perpetuating the stigmatization of the community.

6. Directions for Future Research: Longitudinal studies over 5-10 years could explore whether the effect of ‘Internalized Meritocracy’ increases or disappears as participants experience inequality in the workplace. Comparative studies of linguistically marginalized SC groups in Tripura and Manipur could help to clarify whether certain results are specific to the Bengali ethnic SC population in the Barak Valley. Ethnographic studies of marriage and kinship could help to clarify the ‘Domain Paradox’ for educated groups.

Taken collectively, these recommendations address the central diagnostic of this study: the disconnect between Ambedkarite aspiration and Ambedkarite action in South Assam is not one of belief but of infrastructure—organizational, legal, pedagogical, and psychological—and can only be overcome through measures that are at once structural and psychological.

6. Conclusion

This investigation of graduate youth in South Assam shows a high ascendancy of Ambedkarite social justice philosophy, but it also shows a huge disconnect when it comes to implementation. The youth here exhibit high clarity about the concept of the "Triple Goal" of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, but this clarity never manifests as a form of social integration. Three transitions mark this state:

1. From Action to Icon: Knowledge of Ambedkar is increasingly transmitted through symbols and slogans rather than through deep engagement with his legal and activist toolkit.

2. The Bifurcated Sphere: A profound "Domain Paradox" exists where 99.6% of respondents acknowledge caste as a boundary in marriage, even while perceiving the public university space as egalitarian.

3. State-Led vs. Society-Led: The movement in Barak Valley appears "state-led," producing policy beneficiaries who are organizationally inert rather than active agents of change.

For Ambedkar's philosophy to move beyond "commemorative politics" in South Assam, there must be a shift from individual meritocratic aspiration toward a collective, infrastructure-based praxis. This requires establishing regional civil society networks and a reformed pedagogy that connects Ambedkar's historical struggles to contemporary regional issues—linguistic marginalization, displacement, and structural exclusion. The implementation gap is not one of ideology but of infrastructure, and it is a gap that concerted, multi-level intervention can bridge.

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