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पाठशाला ही इंसानों का सच्चा हितैषी है।”



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"Echoes of Equality: Ambedkar's Literary Fire"

- DR. SURENDER SINGH
Associate Professor of English

Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is widely revered as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and a pioneering advocate for Dalit and women's rights. However, his literary and philosophical contributions have often been overshadowed by his political legacy. This paper seeks to excavate the lesser-known dimensions of Ambedkar's thought, which traverse ethics, epistemology, social justice, political realism, and metaphysics. His work reflects a unique confluence of indigenous experience and global intellectual traditions. Drawing from Buddhism, liberalism, Marxism, and pragmatism, Ambedkar offered a powerful critique of caste and a compelling vision for human dignity and rational social order. Through close readings of his major and marginal texts, this paper repositions Ambedkar as a major philosopher of liberation and modernity.

Keywords : Ambedkar, philosophy, ethics, Buddhism, rationality, justice, caste, epistemology, metaphysics, social democracy

Introduction

"Ambedkar's legacy is not a relic but a roadmap—a guide for radical social transformation. (1) - Suraj Yengde

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar remains a towering figure in Indian political history, yet his philosophical insights are rarely afforded the serious academic attention they merit. His intellectual legacy encompasses not just constitutional design and legal advocacy, but a deep and original engagement with fundamental philosophical questions. As Ananya Vajpeyi observes, "Ambedkar's intellectual energy was equally moral, political, and philosophical, though rarely acknowledged as such." (2) This paper aims to illuminate the depth of Ambedkar's philosophical inquiry, highlighting his contributions to epistemology, ethics, political theory, and metaphysics through an analysis of key texts and lesser-known writings.

I. Epistemic Justice and the Critique of Brahmanical Knowledge

Ambedkar viewed caste not merely as a social structure but as a system of epistemological control. "Caste is not

merely a division of labor. It is a division of laborers,"(3) he declared, emphasizing how caste constructs and restricts knowledge production. Influenced by John Dewey's pragmatism and Buddhist rationality, Ambedkar rejected the epistemic authority of the Shastras: "The real remedy for breaking caste is not to kill Brahmins, but to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras." (4)

His notion of epistemic justice is grounded in lived experience, challenging the authority of inherited tradition. Ambedkar's work prefigures contemporary critiques of epistemic injustice, particularly in the way knowledge systems marginalize certain voices and communities.

II. Ethics of Self-Respect and Human Dignity

Central to Ambedkar's moral philosophy is the concept of self-respect, drawn from the Buddhist tenet *atta dipa bhava* (be a light unto yourself). He contended that "Lost rights are never regained by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggle." (5) His ethics are rooted in struggle, dignity, and the imperative to recognize each individual's intrinsic worth.

For Ambedkar, justice was not a procedural principle but an ethical

imperative: "Justice is another name for liberty, equality and fraternity." (6) He aligned these values with both Enlightenment ideals and Buddhist thought, rejecting utilitarianism in favor of a moral realism grounded in equality.

III. Political Realism and Democratic Ethics

Ambedkar redefined democracy as a moral and social ethos: "Democracy is not a form of government, but a form of associated living." (7) This vision of democracy is inseparable from mutual respect and shared responsibility. He warned against the dangers of populism and uncritical thinking: "The real enemy of democracy is the gramophone mind." (8)

In contrast to liberal theories that divorce ethics from politics, Ambedkar's realism emphasized the moral foundations of governance. Democracy, for him, must be grounded in justice and moral deliberation, not mere majoritarian rule.

IV. Buddhism as Rational Religion

Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism represented not a renunciation of politics, but its culmination in ethical-spiritual form. He emphasized that "The Buddha was against priesthood, rituals, and the supernatural," (9) positioning the

Buddha as a rational moral reformer.

In 'The Buddha and His Dhamma', Ambedkar recast Buddhism as a philosophy of human liberation: "Religion is for man and not man for religion." (10) His interpretation of Buddhism sought to recover its anti-authoritarian, egalitarian core, making it a viable alternative to both Brahmanism and dogmatic Marxism.

V. Metaphysics of Social Interdependence

Ambedkar's metaphysical vision centered on the idea of interdependence, drawn from the Buddhist concept of *pratityasamutpāda* (dependent origination). Social structures, he argued, are historically conditioned and mutable. "Society is always composed of the classes whose interests are divergent," he wrote; thus, justice is not harmony but a dynamic balancing of interests. (11) His rejection of metaphysical determinism in favor of historical contingency makes his thought highly relevant for contemporary critical theory.

VI. Feminist and Intersectional Philosophy

Ambedkar's advocacy for women's rights remains a largely unexplored aspect of his philosophy. In his seminal essay "The Rise and Fall of Hindu

Women," he argued that "The progress of any society is measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved." (12) His critique of endogamy and the Manusmriti laid the groundwork for an intersectional critique of caste and patriarchy. His feminism was not ancillary but central to his broader vision of human dignity and justice.

He meticulously traces the genesis of gender oppression to the Manusmriti and Brahmanical patriarchy, exposing the deliberate regression from the rights afforded to women during the Buddhist period. He asserts, "The position of women under the Vedas and Smritis is that of a slave... subject to male control throughout her life." (13) By historicizing the legal and religious codification of subjugation, Ambedkar transcends liberal feminist formulations and instead proposes a radical restructuring of cultural and epistemic hierarchies. His insistence on the indivisibility of caste and gender marks him as a theorist of what would later be conceptualized as intersectionality—a mode of analysis attentive to the simultaneity of multiple axes of domination.

Ambedkar's thought inaugurates an indigenous intersectional framework

long before the term entered Western academic discourse through Kimberlé Crenshaw. In his 1916 Columbia thesis "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", he prefigures an analysis of what might now be called "interlocking systems of oppression." He argues, "The superimposition of endogamy over exogamy... has preserved the caste system" (14), highlighting how patriarchal control over women's sexuality underpins the entire caste order. Furthermore, his support for the Hindu Code Bill was not merely legal reformism but an effort to dismantle the juridico-cultural apparatus that rendered Dalit and non-Brahmin women doubly subaltern. As Sharmila Rege articulates, "Ambedkar placed women at the center of the caste question". (15) In this regard, Ambedkar should be read as an architect of a subaltern feminist hermeneutics deeply attentive to how caste, class, and gender co-constitute marginality in colonial and postcolonial India.

VII. Comparative Dialogues with Western Thinkers

Ambedkar engaged deeply with Western philosophy. While he appreciated Dewey, Roosevelt, and Mill, he

also critiqued Hegel, Plato, and Marx. In Buddha or Karl Marx, he concluded: "Marx's dictatorship of the proletariat leads to loss of liberty, while Buddha's way is liberty, equality and fraternity without violence." (16)

This comparative method allowed Ambedkar to develop a dialogical philosophy that synthesized Eastern and Western paradigms, offering an alternative to both capitalist liberalism and Marxist authoritarianism.

Conclusion : Toward a Global Philosophy of Liberation and Fraternity

Ambedkar's philosophical work constitutes a coherent and original system rooted in ethical realism, epistemic justice, and rational humanism. His legacy is not merely political or juridical but deeply philosophical. Omvedt positions Ambedkar's movement as multifaceted, challenging social norms and dominant ideologies as remarked, "Ambedkar's movement was not only a political struggle but a cultural and ideological revolution." (17) As he urged: "My final word of advice to you is educate, agitate, organize—have faith in yourself." (18) Recognizing Ambedkar's place in global philosophy is essential for any serious engagement with justice, freedom, and

human dignity in the modern world. These beautiful lines speak volumes of Babasaheb Ambedkar's echoes of equality and literary fire:

**"He rose from dust, not just to speak,
But to lift the silenced, to raise the weak.
In pages of law, in echoes of right,
Ambedkar burned caste with wisdom's light."**

- DR. SURENDER SINGH

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