

has sections vividly etched in biographical and historical detail, making it impossible to misconstrue the purpose of the book. Several sections, such as “Women and Vaishnavism: Transgression and Patriarchy”, “Between Manuscript and Print: Authenticity, Purity, and the Politics of Selfhood”, “Celebrating Gauranga’s Birth Anniversary” and “Nabadwip: History, Topography, Discourse”, might not seem fundamental to the tone of the book at first, however, a careful evaluation is likely to impress the reader with the richness it lends to the primary and more aligned sections. The conclusions provided with each chapter are essential in outlining the main argument as well as in understanding the author’s precise commentary on the chapters. The personal approach the author adopts in the Epilogue deserves special mention and altogether, the book provides a fine and comprehensive account of Vaishnavism, keeping at its centre the controversial figure of Chaitanya, and addressing the controversies and ambiguities surrounding it in a pervasive manner.

ANKITA SUNDRIYAL
EFL University, Lucknow, India

AMBEDKAR AND OTHER IMMORTALS: AN UNTOUCHABLE RESEARCH PROGRAMME. By Soumyabrata, Choudhury. New Delhi: Navayana, 2018. 272 p.

Soumyabrata Choudhury in this book attempts to explain certain contemporary issues and questions through the texts and arguments given by Dr. B. R Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste*, *What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables*, *Castes in India*, *Constitution*, “*Away from the Hindu*”, and “*A Plea to the Foreigner*” etc. By discussing some main texts of Ambedkar, Soumyabrata has discussed some of the relevant debates/confusions/questions regarding many ongoing issues in recent time, which also used to be burning issues during Ambedkar’s time. For example, conversion, politics over castes/identities, autonomy, appropriation, alliances and so on. He also applies the comparative method to understand the present issues and questions, for example, Alain Badiou, Gandhi, and Aristotle on the one hand and Dr. Ambedkar on the other. Therefore, I would say it’s a good hermeneutic philosophical exercise in understanding Ambedkar’s philosophy and current debates.

The linguistic analysis of Ambedkar is innovative in the book and in author’s mind (51). For example, in chapter one, the author has used the terms from *Castes in India* and *Annihilation of Caste* — Association, Imitation, Innovation, Excommunication, Similarity, Common and Communication. In the second chapter, he has clearly articulated about the intellectual scholarly life of Ambedkar in terms of language (universal and so-called academic language sense) and on the other hand Ambedkar’s engagement with the masses, their real life in a society that is pragmatic and based on ordinary language. In order to explain this language and theorization aspect, Soumyabrata has illustrated the seminal essays—*Castes in India* and *Annihilation of Caste*. The playing of ordinary language in conceptualization particularly in these essays is interesting. In order to overcome from the common name which is fit to endogamous logic (the foundation of caste and casteism), Ambedkar makes the counter move “other name” for example his conversion to Buddhism (95). This is also a pan-Indian phenomenon among untouchable communities.

Therefore, they imagine and relate to some other name. In order to understand this, Soumyabrata has quoted Ambedkar "there is a general attempt to call themselves by some name other than the untouchable". For example the Chamars call themselves Ravidas or Jatavas. The Doms call themselves Shilpakars. The Pariahs call themselves Adi-Dravidas, the Madigas call themselves Arundhatiyas, the Mahars call themselves Chokhamela or Somavanshi, and the Bhangis call themselves Balmikis (96). The third chapter is all about reading Ambedkar with Gandhi's thoughts again seems to be innovative exploration to understand present times. He has discussed Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi in the context of conversion, caste and religion. Chapter four is about the analysis of Ambedkar's philosophy of politics through caste and debt or ontological debt by Brahmin. Following that the argument of Ambedkar as first "Europeanist", and understanding politics from a comparison point of view but the base for everything is drawn from the universal exigency—"politics exists" is a new way of understanding politics (39). In chapter five, author has explored about the French Revolution and Mahad Satyagraha as two different historical temporalization and unprecedented events for the equality and that is why immortal. Author has compared both the events and tried to explore the politics before and after these events.

In chapter six and seven the comparison between India and Greek is one of the metaphors to understand the reality of democracy in India. Because democracy and constitution were constituted in a context with a lot of hopes but now due to the right wing's inherent opposition to the constitution it's going through a lot of changes. This metaphor is a good example to understand the Hindu majoritarian terrain. The entry into spaces of incorporeal transformation does not ensure the real presence of the people in the public which is why Soumyabrata argues about the three dimensions of equality, such as axiomatic, predicative and dis-positional equality which talks about not only equality in notion but in practice and action. This example is a better illustration to understand the policies/politics of saffronisation in Indian democracy.

There are many innovative explorations author articulates in this book regarding current debates with historical grounds, for example, the idea of "singularity" in Ambedkar. The idea of singularity means here Ambedkar as an idea which should not be always understood with alliances to other's ideas or frameworks. Regarding this there are many debates which are going on in the university spaces and out in the society. For example, the debate of alliance of left and right, Ambedkar and Marx, Ambedkar-Marx and Bhagat Singh, Ambedkar-Marx-Bhagat Singh-Gandhi. These are the contexts, where one can locate and understand the politics of "appropriation". These alliances are against the Dalit rigour and its "autonomic" politics and movement. Thus, this book articulates the singularity of Ambedkar although there are many possibilities that are brought up by many right and left wings forces to distort the Ambedkar's philosophy.

This book also articulates the becoming of Dalit as a conscious political act for the emancipation from oppression and this happens through the methodological separatism (This method is borrowed by the author from Badiou) in Ambedkar and Dalits all over India. Author has exposed the contemporary politics and university discourses on knowledge production, its nature, contradiction, positive-ness and challenges before the many subjects. Although he argues for the singularity in Ambedkar there is a contradiction in the book for the same when he again argues for singularity exists in a plurality or universal exists in particular. Author argues for there is no Ambedkar-Badiou, Ambedkar-Marx, Ambedkar-Mao, then I am bit skeptic that why this book itself is comparative

analysis or axiomatic analysis/framework to understand certain issues and questions? If according to Soumyabrata, there is no Ambedkar-Badiou, Ambedkar-Marx, Ambedkar-Mao then Ambedkar should be Ambedkar and he should be studied independently to understand many issues and questions. If this is the case and author applies the methodological separatism in this book then it is a false argument or proposition. Studying Ambedkar from the lens of Badiou's method is puzzling for the reader because I do not think Ambedkar ever had encountered about Badiou in his work. But it's always an intellectual labour which can be compared anything with anyone.

In my reading, in this book the category of "Dalit" has been used as an "end", rather than "means" to the end. Here Dalit category as end in the sense author treats it as absolute goal, it's like becoming Dalit is good in itself and annihilation of caste rather Dalit as a political category and means which helps all untouchables to an extent politically to unite and one step forward towards their end annihilation of caste. If we use it as end there is a problem in the argument as far as the emancipatory project of Ambedkar is concerned. For example, the methodological separatism is a process to create a consciousness among Dalit and engage with the structure rather than this being the only solution to the problem that is the annihilation of caste in an absolute sense or normative sense.

The immortality in this book in the context of Ambedkar means the idea of "equality" and the Mahad Satyagraha as an unprecedented event in Ambedkar which is the main thesis in the book. Who is immortal here? The Mahad Satyagraha as a mark for equality and Ambedkar is immortal. According to the author, even we have a democratic constitution and system in law but in practice there is a contradiction to the laws of the constitution. But it is for sure that there is an idea called equality for which many anti-caste revolutionaries struggled for and it is yet to culminate. Author has defined immortality of different kinds such as historical immortals, heavenly immortality, civic immortality, military immortality, axiomatic immortal etc. Basically author's arguments on immortality/immortal can be understood in two senses. One is the virtue of actions and events done by the great men for the example of Pericles and Athenians soldiers' dedication for the city state and noble death in the battle. Other is the historical upsurges which was being constituted by the men in a historical context for example Mahad Satyagraha for equality which is both axiomatic and historical as well. So in this context, the idea of equality is immortal to the immortals (Ambedkar and others). There is no doubt this book is articulating the contradiction between social democracy and political democracy where we see legally, equality, liberty and fraternity and justice are there but practically it lacks.

But in chapter five and seven if we see (Ambedkar and other immortals in politics as comparative analysis) or in the overall book why only one event can be considered as the mark for the immortality, there are lot of events in Ambedkar's life and struggles which were really unprecedented and hence makes him immortal such as making of the Indian constitution, burning of *Manusmriti*, Hindu code bill and conversion to Buddhism on 14 October, 1956. However, there can be two different possible ways to understand immortality. First may be Dr. Ambedkar and others have struggled a lot to culminate the idea of equality and justice in society and this has been in the consciousness of the anti-caste tradition and movements. Therefore, he is immortal for them. Second, from pragmatist point of view that Ambedkar himself is against hero worshipping and so immortality. Therefore, from the point of view of pragmatism how far its "useful" to say

immortal to Ambedkar and others is contestable? So theoretically and philosophically it seems to be not wrong to say Ambedkar and others as immortal but from a pragmatist point of view, it's very problematic and harmful for Dalit and other marginalized. However, Ambedkar himself has clarified and brought the attention about the usage of metaphorical concepts like *Karma, Rebirth in the Buddha and his Dhamma*. In my reading the author has mentioned about "historical immortality" of Ambedkar along with Gandhi and Pericles again it's a genealogical contradiction in his argument.

In this book equality has been explored as the foundation and only axiomatic in Ambedkar's thought which is a reductionism about Ambedkar; because Ambedkar himself says in the Constituent Assembly Speech in 1949 that liberty, equality and fraternity cannot be reduced to each other rather they supplement to each other. For example, the category of conversion is very necessary to claim liberty and since Dalits and other lower castes are enslaved by caste and Brahminism they should be liberated first. So in order to establish justice in society, it's very important to claim liberty and fraternity as equal to equality in Ambedkar's philosophy. In this book, the term "subaltern" is being used without criticality to the situations. Further this category is unable to provide enough logic to understand the genealogy and philosophy of anti-caste tradition and their politics. The question that can be asked here is—would it be possible to understand the caste reality and graded inequality/graded sovereignty by applying subaltern framework?

Therefore, this book is also not an exception but follows the same methods and frameworks to understand Ambedkar as other so-called Indian social scientists have been doing. The scholars we can refer like D.R. Nagaraj, Ramachandra Guha, Suhas Palshikar, Aishwary Kumar, Arundhati Roy and so on. One of the examples is when people try to understand Ambedkar they bring Gandhi in the discussion and that is what we find in this book too. It can also be argued against that Ambedkar's philosophy should not be reduced either to a Europeanist or Indian because that might be a reductionism. Lastly, I as a reader and observer wondering why the book's title is an untouchable research programme, although the author is dealing with larger concerns in academic and activism. However, instead of some limitations in the book which I have pointed out, the interesting attention in the book is philosophical and political in articulation about Ambedkar's works and what's going on recently in socio-political discourses in India, which the author has done objectively. Otherwise the brahminical scholarships never recognize that Ambedkar as an idea or philosophy.

BANSIDHAR DEEP
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India