# Ambedkar In the Digital Age:
# Caste, Gender and Democracy
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## ABSTRACT:

The paper attempts to comprehend the complexities of caste, gender, and democracy by analyzingdifferent aspects of Ambedkar's writings and other related texts. It also aims to uncover the similarities anddisparities between digital and physical realities. It has been discovered that, like offline environments, onlineoutlets reflect oppressive and abusive practices against women and marginalized caste groups, and are therefore,with few exceptions, clearly representations of the same real-world phenomena.

## KEYWORDS:

Caste, Gender, Democracy, Digitalization, Reconstruction

## Introduction:

B. R. Ambedkar, a champion for women and human rights and a leading social reformer, hasgiven a great deal to the world's crucial understanding of democracy, freedom and governance. Hisconceptualization of the genesis and continuity of the subservience of castes and women is the productof thorough socio-historical analysis and the idea that the quest for human rights and social justice is ofgreat significance and fundamental to a respectful existence. By getting into his understanding of thereal world through his writings, this article seeks to explore the reconstruction of caste and genderidentities through virtual spaces such as the internet or mass media. The future of democracy, in itsentirety, in the digital age, is also being examined.

## Methodology:

This study paper provides a narrative analysis of caste, gender, and democracy using secondaryinformation sources and other related materials.

## Caste in India: Working Prospects and Change:

Caste is a hierarchical grouping of people in which their mobility of social status is severelyrestricted. Ambedkar (1917), one of India's most

learned personalities, has excoriated the caste systemfor lacking any scientific basis for its classification into fixed, watertight compartments that perpetuategraded inequality. Supporters of this system argue that it allows society to function moreinterdependently. Ambedkar (1917), on the other hand, concluded after a thorough historicalexamination of various religious and socio–economic texts that caste serves no useful purpose in society,but rather promotes corruption and exploitation of people. It smothers the public spirit and sense ofpublic charity by advocating responsibility as caste loyalty, resulting in forced exclusion andunfavourable inclusion (Ambedkar, 1917; Sen, 2000). Ambedkar (1917) identified the division of castesinto different groups as the foundation of privilege and exploitation, and described it as a division oflabourers rather than a division of labour because it stifles innovation and fosters distrust betweenthem.

Many modern liberal thinkers believe that caste is evolving in Indian society, and haveattributed various aspects of change to it (Kumar, 2014; Jodhka, 2015). The evolution of caste can beseen by listing some of them and grouping them under structural, functional, and attitudinal changes:

1.  Structural change:Many believe that structural support for brahmin supremacy has dwindled. With the advancementof educational attainment, and legal and constitutional support, the concepts of equality, liberty, andfraternity gained traction. Special constitutional provisions provided to certain groups of peoplefrom the weaker sections of the society under Part XVI have boosted their confidence and providedthem with opportunities, as well as enabling them to stand firm against exploitation in some cases.

2.  Functional change and change in status fixation:Some believe that occupational flexibility has resulted in a shift in status fixation (Jodhka, 2015).Liberalized constraints and advancement of means of transport and communication have broughtintergenerational mobility in education for women and marginalized caste groups. The lifestyle hasconflated hygiene rules with caste restrictions, making it easier to maintain caste hierarchy in termsof pure and impure. However, marriage restrictions remain in effect, and any change is met withvehement societal opposition.

3.   Attitudinal Change:Ascriptive status benefits only the upper caste elites, not the general public. People in the middle ofA shift in attitude towards economic benefits and the exercise of power over others also influencedchanges the economic scale, on the other hand, believe in a performance–based hierarchy whilemaintaining ritual status. As a result, for them, the law of karma and the doctrine of soultransmigration have been diluted by hard work.

Caste discrimination has evolved into a more effect–oriented phenomenon, whereas, thephilosophical foundations of caste discrimination continue to be rigidly enforced, even if latently.According to Ambedkar (1917), caste has its genesis and perpetuation in patriarchal control overwomen and marriage choices. As a result, caste has never been free of women's exploitation. With fewexceptions, patriarchal forces continue to hold women captive, and the freedom to choose one'smarriage partner, which is a personal and private matter, is heavily influenced by cultural dictations andreligious sanctions.

**Gender and Patriarchy: Interrelated Evolutionism**

Gender is a social construct that divides people into sexes, each with their own set of socialroles. Sexuality has always been seen as a gateway to culture, and cultural dispositions have alwaysdominated this realm. Consequently, patriarchy emerged as a result of dominance over sexual desires.The purpose was also to give control of property rights to a small group of people in a closed circlewith caste and ethnic boundaries (Ambedkar, 1917; Rodrigues, 2002).

Gender roles are also defined as the ascriptive status of sexes within the binary of men andwomen. This has been used to draw dividing lines between the sexes, with females assigned to unpaidcare work and described as emotional and weak, in need of male protection. Outside work wassomething that men reserved for themselves. Therefore, there is a complex and interconnectedevolutionism between gender and patriarchy.

Caste and gender construction also share a lot of similarities in terms of social role allocation,private and public space engagement, occupational boundaries, marriage restrictions, property rights,and socio–ritual privileges. Gender has only two divisions, caste has four, excluding untouchables, andthere are many more subdivisions in the hierarchical orders. Both caste and gender discrimination, onthe other hand, is a

pattern-oriented phenomenon with the presumption of superiority and inferiority,as well as marginalization as an effect. As a result, caste and gender are intertwined aspects that definesome groups' privileges while marginalizing others.

## Caste and Gender: Digital Reflections

Digital sociality is fostering virtual human interaction and socialization in today's world, which isdominated by communication and networking grids. Friendships, relationships, marriages, and othersocial connections are all pronounced and carried out by the use of social media sites. However, theonline world, like the physical world, is not immune to power dynamics, and digital networks haveonce again become a reflection of socioeconomic inequality and marginalization.

In the case of gender abuse, multiple threats and offensive language appear on social mediaplatforms on a daily basis in an attempt to silence women's voices in developing countries like India.This not only works against the person to whom it may be addressed, but it also sends a message thatmen are superior to other sexes in positions of authority. Women's socio-historical disadvantages havea detrimental effect on their share of benefits in modern society as well. Women's virtual movement inthe online realm is regulated by their digital engagement, as the movement of women in traditionalsocieties was restricted in order to control their choices, especially sexuality, resulting in a large genderdigital divide in men's favour (Kumar, 2018).

Furthermore, the role of family in one's friendship remains intact, reinforcing the notion ofsame-gender friendship, and it's difficult to allow friendship between people of different genders, evenonline, without attaching any negative connotations to it. And if it does happen, it will be subjected toa variety of restrictions. True, fear of being watched has harmed the psychological and emotionalwellbeing of the younger generation more than anything else. Resistance to patriarchal subjugation andinequality has, on the other hand, made a way through online media channels, as seen in the #MeToomovement. However, only a limited number of people are able to tackle the social stigma and comeforward to speak freely about their experiences of exploitation and violence.

Another factor that has been expressed heavily on digital platforms is caste. Today, economic,educational, and occupational statuses play a

significant role in digital relationships. However, the coreconditions for any involvement are still religious, ritual, and social, with caste identities playing a majorrole. As much of the space is occupied and dominated by upper caste elites, the digitalization of castehas diversified its connotation and ill effects. Numerous online communities, many of which are basedon caste affiliations are very easy to find today. Although digital caste is as diverse as elitism today,ritual foundations are at the core of choices and preferences, not only in recruitment but also inrelationships with friends, mates, and spouses. Online dating apps and marriage websites can be used toinvestigate the dynamics of marriage and the associated caste preferences. While talking about castechoices in love and marriages, Dr. Dhar, a women's studies professor at the University of Michigan,asks, "How many love marriages do we know of between Brahmins and Dalits?", in her latest

**Collection of essays** (**Kirpal, 2020**).

Boywad (2020), studied different patterns of relationships, such as friendship and love, whileresearching at the JNU campus in New Delhi, and noticed that 'love' could also be a social constructionin which questions about caste, class, and gender arise when choosing a romantic partner. Technologyhas also been identified as one of the most important interventions in providing information aboutone's identity. As a result, endogamous marriages have found a new home on digital platforms in orderto maintain caste.

**Future of Democracy and Digital Marginalization**

Ambedkar's vision of democracy and his ideal of a 'good society' were inextricably linked. Oneof the important aspects of Ambedkar's democratic vision was that it was geared towards socialtransformation and human progress. He considered 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' to be essentialelements of a good society (Idiculla, 2017).

Democracy is significant not only in terms of politics, but also in terms of socio, cultural,economic, and other aspects. For one to be able to engage effectively and thereby in every element ofthe democratic setup, social democracy is absolutely important (Rodrigues, 2002). However, the twomost prominent forms of social agency, caste and gender, do not bring democratic inclusion into thepicture. Caste and gender are both based on the idea of a power hierarchy. As a result, if anyparticipation is given to

women and marginalized caste groups, it will not have the same influence overdecisions as dominant forces such as higher caste status and male privileges.

The virtual media world, where participation was ostensibly free and democratic, once againreflects real-world power relations in myriad guises. The following are some of the major outlines thatcharacterize the undemocratic digital setup:

1. Participation limitations:In India, digital penetration is inequitable. Not only the economic capital but cultural and socialaffiliations also influence the digital reach and activity. Most of the Indian digital users are also notthe creators of contents rather they are the passive consumers of services and information providedthrough that platform.

2. Digitalization: A political rhetoric in India: Rather a socio-economic intervention, digitalization has gained acceleration in recent past forpolitical reasons. Since there is so little way to verify their authenticity, fake truths, often withpolitical agendas, have become dominant in shaping reality over online platforms. As a result, whatappears to be public opinion is simply the viewpoint of the online platform's dominant players,who can exploit and manipulate it according to their own interests.

3. Increasing political atrocities and degrading voices of dissent:When the number of online passive consumers grows, so does the threat of dissenting voices,especially against big corporations, technocrats, and political figures. As a result, using power andstate repressive agents to muzzle dissenting voices may become another means of suppressingfreedom of expression. It induces a symbolic fear of actively being online. This causes psych emotionaldiscomfort for the dissenting voices which results in an undemocratic condition in whichfacts can be understood but not expressed or explained to others.

4. Economic compulsion and inequitable benefits:The benefits of the online economy are not equal for everyone. Those who can afford to switch tothe digital economy enjoy the greatest benefits. Small businesses and others who are not well-versedin technical know-how, on the other hand, face hindered choices. This can also lead toonline fraud, which causes significant damage to people who are on

the margins.

5.  Life chances of people:"Life chances" is a probabilistic concept that defines the possibility of a person's life turning out acertain way in particular circumstances (Kumar, 2018). Socioeconomic factors influence digitaloutcomes and women and marginalized caste groups are often excluded from digital platforms for avariety of reasons, one of which is 'violence', which can take the form of verbal, sexual, or physicalabuse. Furthermore, although online education offers content, it does not inspire learners to engagein critical thinking. All of this restricts their public participation and establishes a cyclicity ofmarginalization for them, limiting their prospects and lowering their life chances.

**Conclusion:**

The function of democracy, according to Ambedkar, is to serve the interests of society as awhole, rather than any particular class, caste, or group. Repression and abuse of a group orunderprivileged people in any way, he believes, is the antithesis of democracy and humanism.However, much as in the real world, digital media platforms have become a public space of violenceand repression of voices of women and oppressed caste groups. As a result, despite appearing to befree and decentralized, the digital media are once again monopolized by those in positions of power. Therefore, much more needs to be done to seriously address the problem of digital violence andmarginalization, and research emphasis and vision, as well as effective policy initiatives, are needed inthis field.

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**Conflict of interest:**

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.