

Between ‘the Self,’ ‘the Other’ and ‘the State’: Ambedkar and the Rise of Civic Consciousness

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Looking at the recent paradigms which are essentially based on giving voices to the marginal who are generally looked upon as ‘the other,’ this paper attempts to build upon the relationship between “the self,” “the other” and “the state.” Every society is based on certain norms, rules, customs and tradition. These social norms are based on the ‘politics of inclusion and exclusion.’ So if there are certain factions of peoples who are included in the social structures of a society, there are also certain sections of people who are excluded in those same social structures. Thus, we come across the ‘social divide.’ This ‘social divide’ is created, propagated and continued through generations. This paper attempts to delineate the origin of this ‘social divide’ which begins within a person as an individual develops social, cultural, religious, regional, gender, and political consciousness. The individual and civic consciousness is marred by these overlapping consciousness. Ambedkar tried to bridge this gap between “the self” and “the other,” between “civic consciousness” and other consciousness by offering a political solution for the “social divide” which he sought through the intervention of the state. The paper attempts to uncover the complex ties that exists between the individual and the state and which affects its relationship with the other.

Twenty-first century has essentially turned out to be a ‘stage of conflict’ between identity, culture and civic consciousness whereby individualism is in conflict with community norms and culture, culture

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has entered in conflict with individual freedom and civic consciousness. This has deepened down to the ulterior conflicts of purity/impurity, superiority/inferiority, insider/outsider, and injustice/justice.

Re-placing 'Power' in 'Love/Hate' Binary

I begin my argument by giving a re-thought to the "love/hate" binary and replacing 'hate' with 'power.' 'Love/hate' binary essentially centers on the emotional quotient in any living being. This being guided and noticed in our private and personal lives. Replacing 'hate' with 'power' essentially transitions from personal to political realm. By reconfiguring the binary of 'love/hate' with 'love/power,' I try to re-locate and re-connect the socio-political dynamics. The social divide begins with the binary of 'self and the other.' Usually, we think that the binary or word-opposite for love is hate. But in a social structure, in this binary of love/hate, hatred is replaced by 'power.' This binary can be correlated to 'self and the other.' There evolves an understanding where 'love' is located in 'self' and 'power' has to be operated on 'others.' Hence, the three binaries can be correlated thus:

Self- Love- Inclusion
Other- Power- Exclusion

Sense of Similarity and Difference

The innocent idea of love that we develop when we are teenagers or young-adults sets in the primordial emotional sense and a deep desire of identification. We are filled with an intense desire to have a person with whom we would like to share everything: our time, our body, our mind, our heart, our emotions, our hardships, our space, our life and our soul. The desire is to find someone who is like us, 'similar' to us, with whom we do not want to have the barrier or boundary of any kind. This is based on our 'sense of identification.' Something we are ready to identify with. A person with whom we share a sense of belongingness, a sense of identification, a sense of similarity, a sense

of oneness, a sense of being with ourselves. The two people in love are the world in themselves as you must have read in most of the love poems. In "Good Morrow" John Donne express in similar vein:

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one; or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die.

But who are the rest? The rest are "the other" with whom there is no sense of identification or similarity.

Love versus Power

The idea of love is based on sharing and expansion of self. Accordingly, people marry, have family, and develop friendships, relationships and neighbourhood with a sense of identification and similarity. This sense of self is thus located deep within our consciousness of regional, communal, ethnic, religious, professional, gender, caste, class and national identification. This identification separates us from the rest and then develops the 'human divide.' This divide is based on power. The 'notion of power' is the antithesis of the 'idea of love.' While love is based on 'sharing,' power becomes 'absolute' and it resists any attempt to sharing. Thus, there is created a category that is 'othered,' which is deprived of their share of power.

Categories of Power/Marginalization

The two sides of this divide become apparent and there are theories, criticism and area of studies that have been developed concomitantly. Let us look at the two sides of the divide through various lens:

Category of Power Category Marginalized Theory

Colonizer Colonized(Postcolonial Theory)
Male Female(Feminist Theory)
Adult Child/Old (Childhood Studies/Gerontology)
Rich Poor(Social Theories)

Capitalist Labour (Marxist Theory)
 Caste Outcaste (Dalit Studies)
 Majority Minority (Ethnic Studies)
 White Black/Coloured (Race Studies)

Power-Purity and Power-Centrism

Interestingly, a normal human tendency is to identify with power. Therefore, our identification also becomes stronger for the category which embodies power and not the category that is deprived of power or remains marginalized. In a social fabric this approach transforms into “power centrism” making the ‘categories of power’ pure, divine, immaculate, virtuous, superior, socially respectable, and giving them authority over the ‘categories marginalized.’ This traditional method of interpretation and ‘collective consciousness’ (Durkheim, 1993) inclined towards ‘power centrism’ results in the ‘hegemonic identification with the powerful and the negation/ othering/ demonization of the powerless.’ This demonization of the marginal exists not only in the established and canonical texts but also the texts by recent writers. For instance in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611) where Sycorax and Caliban who are demonized are projected as the colonial other. While Sycorax is presented as a witch, Caliban is presented as uncouth and uncivilized. In so many narratives women are presented as “madwoman” or vicious ladies who are perverts or psychopaths for instance Amy in Gillyn Flynn’s *Gone Girl*. In Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* Jim is seen as the racial other and in J.D. Salinger’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird* Tom Robinson is targeted by the white society for being coloured and alleged of rape. Mahasweta Devi in her story “Little Ones” shows how the agariyatribals were deprived of proper food and nourishment so that they remained dwarf. Their demonization becomes apparent: “Legend has it that the Agariyas are of the demon asur clan” (Devi 4). Being tribal reduced them to the status of being asura or demon. In many of the stories we also come across references where old people who live in isolation are seen as

witches or monsters. In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* Bakha is shown as the caste-other who has the power to defile other caste people. In Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* reader comes across another social divide between majority and minority. Amir the protagonist says about Hassan, who belongs to an underprivileged Hazara minority: "Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price" (Hosseini 73)? The social divide evinces how the other can be sacrificed.

In most of the cases when such othering is depicted 'the other' is shown in a negative light and also with a power to imbalance the established power-center. It is easy to understand this demonization of other as an ideological and social construct. As the Marxist criticism makes it clear that "the class which is ruling material force in society is also the ruling intellectual force. Having at its disposal the means of production, it is empowered to disseminate its ideas in the realms of law, morality religion and art" (Habib 531).

Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Boys Who Fought* is an innovated version of *The Mahabharata*. In this book he refers to all the characters to whom justice was denied, whom their share was denied. That makes a long list: Eklavya, Karna, Draupadi, the forest, the animals, the Pandavas and also the Kaurvas, all of them consumed in a culminating war. He concludes the book by stating that:

Animals in the forest take food from nature. Humans can give food to each other. When we refuse to share food, the hungry attack and there is war....

However, sharing is difficult....

As long as we look for excuses, reasons and justifications to not share, the mighty will never take care of the meek and the meek will always hate the mighty. There will be no dharma in the society. If we have to fight, let us fight that urge within us that stops us from sharing, that urge that stops us from being humans. (Pattanaik 2017b, 105-107).

Therefore, we come across the lopsided discourse of power-

narratives that favour the privilege and deny even the human status to the other. To reduce a group or community to a status of sub-human or inhuman removes the ethical responsibility that we owe as a society and civilization to them. Civic consciousness is founded on the notion of sharing and acceptance of the ethical responsibility that we owe to our environment, nature, culture, society, nation and people.

Rhizomic Nature of Power Structures

Sharing the common present, we head towards the common future. The past was not common. Different communities had different past. That past was not golden for all. Therefore, what was needed was an evolution of newer models that could include the marginal and excluded factions from the society. Ambedkar tried to work this out through state intervention by the policy of inclusion through reservation. As it goes through public and political debates there had always been an air of discontent and conflict regarding this state measure. Sometimes seen as a hurdle in talent hunting, sometimes seen as a modus operandi for getting in the system the underserving, and sometimes seen as a social and economic burden, reservation has been a bone of contention. Reservation was not meant only to provide economic security but also the social and political security removing the stigma of exclusion and marginalization. Ambedkar's final address to the Constituent Assembly raised not only the plausible questions but also hinted at possible solutions for the discordant and widespread anomalies in social fabric, as he says:

Political Democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of its social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity which are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality; equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity.

This speech of Ambedkar explains the enigma that lies at the heart of social structure. We try to locate the injustice from one point while its structure remains unaffected because of its rhizomic nature, as expressed by Deleuze and Guittari.

[U]nlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point...it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two, or even directly three, four five, etc...It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions is motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows... Unlike tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an antigenealogy... The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Delueze and Guittari 23).

Race, caste, ethnicity, patriarchy, capitalism, regional and religious consciousness also act rhizomically, expanding in all directions, penetrating from all ends so that even if one point is targeted others continue to operate. This makes it difficult to counter social divides which are based on such deep rooted power structures. Therefore, Ambedkar's aim was to target such power-structures through a change in civic consciousness and by bringing everyone in that socio-economic and juridical-political structure.

Civic Consciousness versus Power-Centrism

This can be better understood from "Road Analogy" in India. All of us have had the experience of walking, cycling, riding a bike, driving or sitting in a car. There are two kinds of hierarchy that operate simultaneously when we move on a road. The Road-hierarchy based

essentially on civic-sense or public-sense. The vehicle hierarchy based on social sense. Road hierarchy divides the road majorly between footpath and rest of the road. The road being further divided according to the width. Footpath is essentially meant for pedestrians and cyclists. The rest of the road for bikes and larger vehicles. A car is a status symbol, with more people buying cars there seems a greater mobility of people in their socio-economic status. What are the advantages of sitting in a car? We do not have to worry about our clothes, if someone spits it does not fall on us, the scratches come on the body of car and not on the body of the people, we do not have to worry about being dirty, about the weather, plus there is usually the comfort of the air conditioner. While riding a bike we have a different advantage, while it gives greater mobility to move in traffic it also makes it vulnerable to the atmosphere. A cyclists will have to put in a great effort to pull the cycle but with excessive advantage of getting through still smaller spaces. Pedestrian has to be careful while walking. Cars acts like a caste, it gives social status, provide social shelter, strength and protection from outside dust and comfort.

The footpath or pavement is like reservation where the pedestrian walk. This footpath is encroached both ways in India by the nearby shops and also by other moving vehicles. The psychology becomes such that while sitting in a car it occurs to us why the cyclists, or pedestrians or rickshaw pullers are even moving on the road hampering the speed of the car. This psychology goes to the extent of encroaching the footpath. At this point what comes in conflict is the civic consciousness and power-centrism. Had it been the civic consciousness we would not intrude in the way of walkers; but, the social status makes us intrude into their zone because of the belief of our own heightened sense of superiority or status and curbing the liberty of the people who also equally require the space for their movement.

The reverse is also true where the walkers sometimes forget their boundary and they straddle unconsciously on the road curbing the

movement of other vehicles, this happens seldom. But even this shows a bent towards the power centrism, to walk on the place which is meant for high speed and heavy vehicles. "I don't have a car so what but road belongs to me," that is usually the feeling which is encountered in such conflicts. Such attitude shows lack of awareness and civic consciousness and also the rootedness in some sort of feudal mind set.

Ambedkar's prime goal was to generate the civic consciousness and heighten the social awareness, as he said "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment has to be cultivated." The same holds true for "civic consciousness" constitutional morality is not possible without the civic consciousness, for as long as we will be driven by our own narrow consciousness of 'the self' and 'the other' we cannot develop a larger, broader, inclusive civic consciousness. Eventually this will result in the failure of our constitutional, national and international goals.

'Self,' 'Other' and 'State'

There can be added a third entity to the binary of 'self and other' and that is state. Though the term 'state' may assume a territorial entity politically, it also acquires an anthropomorphous form. State is not merely the land, but it also needs agents and agency. A land cannot make laws, execute and implement them; it cannot punish or make provisions. Then what is the state? Definitely it needs a body/bodies to acquire its entity. Therefore, largely we can say that in formal sense the state is formed of government (national, state and local), government machinery including the bureaucracy, clerks, peons, drivers and everyone that is engaged in the government services; and in the informal sense it will include everyone in a democracy within its territory: "we the people."

The idea of state is an abstract notion but an ideal one. The state aims at perfection and well-being of everything and everyone that exists in its territorial jurisdiction. However, the actors in a state are

human beings and these actors cannot be divorced from their social and cultural upbringing. Therefore, the idealism of the state is compromised because these actors assume a 'sense of self' and when they assume a 'sense of self,' they also tend to retain their idea of 'other.' So, when Article 15 of the *Constitution of India* states that "The state shall not discriminate against any citizens on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them;" it is not the state that actually discriminates but the agents who enter the government services and offices with their identity and retain their 'sense of self' as belonging to a particular region, community, ethnicity, religion, profession, gender, caste, or class. Hence, the purpose of the state is marred by the 'power centric' individuals or 'categories of power' who continue to engage in the process of 'othering' once they enter the juridico-political structure.

Individual Freedom versus Objective Law

In the postmodern period when the political structure has completed its trajectory from the monarchy to democracy. It is important for us to understand that this has also resulted in a change in the social and economic set-up. In monarchies which were based on Monarch-Subjects relationship, the monarch had all the rights and the subjects had all the duties. While in democracy the case is opposite, in the relationship between Government and Citizens, Citizens have all the rights and the government has all the duties (Srivastava, "Rise and Development of Democracy"). Now, between the self and the other we have 'law.' Let's attribute this law to government. This law is based on regulation, control, punishment and thus circumscribing 'the idea of freedom' and self-interest and desire (Mahajan, "The Idea of Freedom"). The problem that lies at the core is what Thomas Paine wrote in "Common Sense":

Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereasthey are not only different, but have different origins. Societyis produced by our wants,

and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. (Paine 5)

Government in democracy is based on the principle of shared interests and 'sharing of power.' This sharing of power is developed through 'intersubjectivity,' as Ambedkar puts it, where different factions are able to reach a consensus on various issues retaining individual interests (Mahajan, 2013). This "law comes from the community through participatory consultation, not from an authority outside and above" (Maxwell 57). Thus, if a state can be used as an organized power "as an instrument of dominance," at the same time it can be used as a "civilising agency and a resource to undermine dominance" (Rodrigues 103). It implies that "state as the collective power and resolve of the society need to be in place to ensure that the collective resolve is in place" (Rodrigues 103). This is possible only in the light of the ideas of 'civic consciousness' and 'constitutional morality.'

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