

Article

Postulating Political Truth Procedure and Ethics in B.R. Ambedkar

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Abstract: Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was certainly a political event, as it stood in stark contrast to the prevailing political climate. This subjectivity was also formalized through the organizations that followed after the conversion. The question that concerns this paper is the following: can there be an ethics derived from the Ambedkarite truth process? This paper tries to assert the universality of Ambedkar's ethics that stem from a political truth process, one that cannot be named as traditional Buddhist ethics or pragmatism. In this sense, Ambedkar's singular ethical position emerges in a situation as an exception to the situation, forming a subjectivity. There are consequences of Ambedkar's political interventions. However, the truth of these interventions must be seen as truth processes that are infinite. This paper asserts Ambedkar's political events as what Badiou calls, truth processes. It examines Ambedkar's texts and political interventions through the four determinations of truths, the 'ethic of truths' and philosophical virtues proposed by Alain Badiou, such as unnameability and moderation. Through the conversion to Buddhism, a liturgy of Dalit Buddhism emerges as a possible mode of existence. This insistence on ethical principles is due to Ambedkar's singular political truths that are at once collective and universal.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Badiou, Dalit Buddhism, political truth

Truths as subjective processes/Difference between Knowledge and Truths

Truths are exceptional in the situation precisely because they escape the realm of the known. This is Badiou's subtractive notion of truth and philosophy. "To say that philosophy has to 'subtract Truth from the labyrinth of meaning' means that it must insist on the distinction between the truth and meaning, truth and sense, truth and opinion, and, first and

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foremost, between truth and knowledge.”¹ According to Badiou, truth is subtracted from the situation—from the realm of the known and the countable—through the modalities of undecidability, indiscernibility, genericity, and unnameability. His notion of truth is process-oriented. As the ‘unnamable’ modality of the subtractive notion of truth declares, if the process of truth and its point of origination is named, it ends in a disaster. This is the reality of the failure of the Soviet Union when Marxist History and economics were objectified and named dialectical materialism; it ended in disaster. Therefore, Badiou proposes two important characteristics of philosophy, unnameability and moderation, as virtues of philosophy.² In order to defend philosophy against the relativism of the sophists, philosophy forces a name onto the process of truth. Naming totalizes the beginning and the process of truths. He maintains that truths are constructed in specific domains such as art, politics, science, and love. These domains are strictly processes. The nature of truth is such that it is always already existent in situations and appears as an inconsistency of the situation. The knot of the sacredness of names, the terror of substances, and the ecstasy of the place of truths result in disaster.³ That is, when truth is objectified—turned into a method or made sacred as the only truth—the erasure of all other truths can lead to catastrophe, as seen in Stalinist Marxism and National Socialism of Germany.⁴ This is why it is the virtue of the subtractive notion of truths that the truth be rendered unnamable.

Another virtue of philosophy is moderation. By moderation, Badiou means that philosophy should never assume that truths are generated inside the domain of philosophy. Philosophy, in itself, as a discipline, is always empty or void. It relies on the events in the domains of arts, politics, science, and love. The task of philosophy is to affirm and construct the consequences of events that emerge in these domains. The moment when philosophy claims to contain truths within itself, instead of embracing the void at its core, it opens the path to disaster. The virtue of moderation means that there is always a multiplicity of truths, and philosophy itself is never the abode of truths. Its sole task is to affirm, reaffirm in contingent situations, and construct truths that emerge as a consequence of various truth processes.

¹ Frank Ruda, “Subtraction—Undecidable, Indiscernable, Generic, Unnameable,” in *Badiou Dictionary*, ed. by Steven Corcoran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 330.

² Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. by Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 130.

³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

Politics as a Truth Procedure

The event, truth, and the subject are central concepts of Badiou's philosophy. These concepts are interlinked, and one concept follows the other. An unprecedented event—an inconsistency within a situation—can unleash a process of truths. Truths that emerge in any of these domains are infinite processes. These processes are carried out by a faithful subject of an event. While describing the process of political truths, Badiou outlines three conditions specific to the political event and the truth procedure that follows from it. Under these three conditions, an event is political, and the ensuing process is one of political truth. These three characteristics are “the material of the event, its relation to the state of the situation, and the numericality of the procedure.”⁵

- 1) Material of the event: For Badiou, the material of a political event is strictly collective. That is to say that a political event is something that pertains to ‘all’. It is not a matter of the number of persons involved in the event or the process; it means that a political declaration is inherently ascribed to all. A political truth located in a situation is at once universal. A political statement is truth only if it ascribes to all humans. This is a quality inherent and unique to political truths. In other truth procedures, such as mathematics, only one other mathematician is required to recognize the truth; in the truth process of love, only the two involved in the process need to recognize the truth of their love; for an artist, the work of art itself is the material of the truth process. These three truth procedures are aristocratic truth processes for Badiou.⁶ Unlike art, love, and mathematics, the political process is inherently a thought for all the elements of the collective. The regime of political thought is collective:

Politics is impossible without the statement that people, taken indistinctly, are capable of the thought that constitutes the post-event political subject. This statement claims that a political thought is topologically collective, meaning that it cannot exist otherwise than as the thought of all.⁷

- 2) The political truth process is the one that has an intrinsic relation to the state of the situation. The state of the situation is that which counts its elements or holds power over it. The state is also the form of government

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 141.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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that governs the situation. Political events occur as exceptions to the 'state' of the situation, and the political truth procedure takes the form of an insurgency. According to Badiou, the political event denies the superpower of the state that governs or 'counts' all elements of the political situation. More precisely, the political process organizes the power of the collective to measure the power of the state. It exhibits the inadequacy of the state by distancing from the state and measuring its power from a distance. The political process relates to the state of the situation in that it overcomes the superpower of the state; this is why it is precisely 'freedom' that measures and negates the dominating power of counting.

- 3) Lastly, the political process essentially considers the infinity of situations that under it in—past, present, and future. Political situations are infinitely open to possibilities. Infinity is the first term for politics. "Every politics of emancipation rejects finitude, rejects 'being towards death'. Since a politics includes in the situation the thought of all, it is engaged in rendering explicit the subjective infinity of situations."⁸

Ethics of Truths

Ethical principles are a way to ensure that abstract political truths manifest in action. For Badiou, ethics is what helps a truth persist.⁹ Political truth requires an ethic of truth. He defines the ethic of truth in the following way: "In general, the 'ethic of a truth' is the principle that enables the continuation of a truth process or to be more precise and complex, that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth."¹⁰ By 'some-one,' Badiou means either a body of truth or a human being seized by the truth of the event, and this 'some-one' exhibits fidelity to the event of truth. However, the nature of events is ephemeral without the subject. Thus, mere fidelity to the event of truth does not lead to the truth process; one must also persist or persevere in the process. This is the fidelity of a fidelity, to be faithful to the fidelity to an event of truth. This is what Badiou means by consistency. Borrowing from Jacques Lacan, Badiou argues that the maxim of consistency in pursuing a truth process is "Not to give up one's desire" and "keep going."¹¹ Apart from Lacan, there is surely a Kantian overtone to Badiou's ethics. However, his

⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI.

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

ethics is strictly immanent and derived from the situation through the subjects of the situation, unlike Kantian ethics that is transcendental.

Badiou differentiates between two kinds of interests: a personal interest (that is, to persevere for one's own needs and wishes) and the other a 'disinterested interest.' As mentioned in the definition of the ethic of truth, a subject becomes a part of the process of the composition of a truth that has seized the subject. The truth is not the truth of an individual but rather exceeds the individual. This is where the subject loses himself/herself (his personal interests, desires, identity) and partakes in a process that exceeds him. The maxim, 'do not give up on your desire,' is to partake in that part of oneself that one does not know. It is to abandon the realm of what we know of ourselves and to enter into a composition of the unknown that has seized and exceeded us. To simply persevere is to pursue one's own interests; to partake in a truth process is to cultivate a disinterested interest. That is, to persevere in the truth process in the event of rupture— one that has broken the structure of the predicates that we have ascribed to ourselves. "Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you."¹² This means that once the subject has become a part of the composition of the truth, it abandons the pursuit of its own interests. One is undoubtedly drawn to connect this idea of disinterested interest to a certain idea of asceticism. For Badiou, asceticism is a possibility to persevere in the truth process. But it is also a possibility to betray and exit the process of truth. It could be a form of cowardice, to renounce and to run away from the real horror of truth or castration. For Badiou, renunciation is, to a certain extent, giving up on one's personal interests. But in the process of truth emerging from a situation, one must invent a way to traverse the treacherous path and not hide behind a path that is already paved.

Four Determinations of the Political Truth

Alain Badiou, in his book *Logics of Worlds*, declares four determinations or characteristics of an emancipatory political truth. According to him, every emancipatory political truth has four determinations, namely, "will (against socioeconomic necessity), equality (against the established hierarchies of power or wealth), confidence (against anti-popular suspicion or the fear of the masses), and authority or terror (against the 'natural' free play of competition)."¹³ These determinations can be understood as consequences of an event of truth in politics. That is, they

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 27.

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are retrospectively inscribed after examination of any emancipatory political event. These determinations are correlative to the characteristics ascribed to the subject of psychoanalysis by Badiou (anxiety, superego, courage, and justice).

In the years 1935-36, Ambedkar took a subjective decision that shook the society. He made a courageous declaration at a conference in Yeola that would manifest after twenty years of duration of thinking at the time of his conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar stated, "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power."¹⁴ This declaration exhibits three characteristics of truths outlined by Badiou: it denies the 'Being towards death' and asserts a new life within this life. As we shall see, Ambedkar devised a version of Buddhism that provides ethics for this truth process.

In an earlier work, *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou uses the term 'courage' synonymously with confidence, which emerges after anxiety due to vacillation. Once the subject has moved from indecisive anxiety to a courageous decision, the subject begins the process of justice. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) can be read through the lens of these four determinations of political truth. He displays an anti-popular will to 'annihilate' the caste order—a will to dismantle the Hindu social order and assert an egalitarian social order. Throughout, Ambedkar persistently emphasizes the notion of courage to overcome the caste order.¹⁵ Last but not least, Ambedkar, a Dalit scholar, authoritatively denounces the caste order and brings out the hypocrisies pertinent to the nature of Hindu political leaders that are due to interpretations of caste hierarchies. This claim unsettled the majority to the extent that they did not let Ambedkar speak nor publish his immaculate *Annihilation of Caste*, which he ultimately published himself. Will, courage, equality, and authority/terror are the four characteristics or determinations of a political truth that can be found in Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar's will for the egalitarian maxim is a formally authoritarian exercise of confidence in the political capacity of the untouchables rather than the Hindu majority.

Political Truth in Ambedkar

Ambedkar's immediate concerns, situated in local struggles and contexts, did not encompass the philosophical elaboration or description of the notion of truth. His viewpoint on philosophical concepts does not align

¹⁴ Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement* (Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2013), 147-156.

¹⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste," in *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. 1*, ed. by Vasant Moon (Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 1987), 21-94.

with the ideas prevalent during his time—such as relativism, positivism, and nihilism—though he occasionally acknowledged these currents. However, there is certainly an undying fidelity towards asserting certain notions—such as equality and individual liberty—as truths. That is to say, Ambedkar’s overall disposition toward the notion of truths was moderate: to assert and affirm truths, but not as ultimate or complete truths. He would believe that truths, too, are subject to modification and failure, and are essentially dependent on the situations in which they appear. Ambedkar’s notion of truth can be understood primarily as the discernment of truth from untruth, and of Good from Evil. A later edition of *Annihilation of Caste* starts with Buddha’s words: “Know Truth as Truth and Untruth as Untruth.” Of course, Ambedkar neither defines truth nor attempts to name it, and he does not regard any truth as sacred. In fact, Ambedkar’s earlier philosophical works, such as *Philosophy of Hinduism*, were written inspired by Nietzsche, primarily to annihilate notions such as ‘whole truth,’ truths related to or resulting from God, or truths that did not relate to the individual’s life on earth. He even equated Platonism as a form of Brahminism. However, Ambedkar does not stop at mere annihilating; as mentioned, he also creates and affirms certain truths with virtues of moderation and unnameability as prescribed by Alain Badiou.

Two important works—partly philosophical and otherwise—have consolidated the notion of truth in Ambedkar: *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme* and *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Risk of Democracy*. These texts highlight the radical universality and equality as an axiomatic truth of Ambedkar’s thought. By asserting certain declarations, affirmations and acts as events, a truth process certainly unleashes as the consequence. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism was an event as it was an exception to the political situation. This subjectivity was also formalized through the organization or the *Sangha* that followed after the conversion. The form or the organization itself is a truth process for the subject. The question that concerns this paper is the following: can there be an ethics derived from the Ambedkarite truth process? This question will be answered with an emphatic affirmation, pointing to Buddhism and/or pragmatism as the foundation of Ambedkar’s ethical discourse. This paper seeks to assert the universality of Ambedkar’s ethics that stem from a political truth process that cannot be reduced to simply Buddhism or pragmatism. In this sense, Ambedkar’s singular ethical position emerges within a situation as an exception to it, forming a subjectivity oriented toward an egalitarian organization.

In *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme*, Shoumyabrata Choudhury examines Ambedkar’s political interventions as political events. The event of the Mahad conference asserts the norm or the

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truth of equality. What makes this event a political event is Ambedkar's analogy between the 'Chavdar Lake' incident and the French Revolution. In both cases, the political truth of equality is affirmed, making the events comparable in their shared assertion of equality as a norm. However, it is not only in the statement of equality as a norm that the universality of this event lies. Rather, it is the "power of the political truth that anyone who utters it can enjoy."¹⁶ These two events are equal and incomparable at the same time since they have in common the overthrowing of the old regime and thinking of a new possibility. Choudhary explains that the event of untouchables drinking water from the common lake is not the ritualistic act that instantly purifies the society of its disease of untouchability. The event lies in declaring the norm of equality as generic. This declaration is not "a modern political breach of the traditional continuum of Hindu history, a conception that would make the Mahad an event that is simply putting into practice/vicariously living/imitative of a modern revolutionary politics that has already been inaugurated somewhere else."¹⁷ Political truth, as Alain Badiou explains, is a decisive assertion that emerges from the event. Political truth has an invariable historical dimension. Overthrowing the old regime and asserting an unprecedented decision is the relation between history and the event. This relation can be named continuity and breach. Yet, this unprecedented breach cannot be produced from its own continuity; it is a supplement in the form of a break or a rupture from the continuity. A truth is constructed by the subject through fidelity to an event. In Ambedkar's case, "Although empirically it is Ambedkar's declaration that creates the event, conceptually, it is Ambedkar who gets instituted as a subject of the event of declaration."¹⁸

The second political event was the conversion to Navayana Buddhism, in which several hundred thousand people left the Hindu religion and accepted Navayana Buddhism. Ambedkar's own conversion to Buddhism, undertaken after 20 years of thinking and labour, was a breach and a rupture in several continuities. It was not a mere conversion from one religion to another. He drafted and modified a new version of Buddhism for the modern subject, as a consequence of this conversion. He shaped Buddhism according to his notion of egalitarian truth, which is now called Navayana Buddhism or Dalit Buddhism. Ambedkar, in his *Buddha and His Dhamma* (the gospel of Buddhism), denies the first two Aryan truths among four and alters the story of Buddha's *Parivrajya* (exit/exile) to a more real and

¹⁶ Shoumyabrata Choudhary, *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme* (Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2018), 174.

¹⁷ Drishadwati Bargi, "Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme by Soumyabrata Choudhary," in *Cultural Critique*, 114:1 (2022), 200-227.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

political story rather than a metaphysical or even emotional story of Buddha encountering old age, death, sickness, etc. This conversion is not only a breach of the continuity of the Hindu tradition but also the Buddhist tradition and in the political realm of the untouchables. Through the event of conversion, Ambedkar affirms the truth of an egalitarian Buddhism that is comparable to and is an answer to the failures of Marx's communism. Before his Buddhism, this compossibility of Buddhist and Communist goals was not a part of any knowledge discourse, yet after understanding the hypothesis, one is forced to admit the truth of Ambedkar's political act.

Choudhary argues that Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was both a religious and a hermeneutic tool. The political event of conversion was not only a decision on religion but an assertion of a new name for the collective subjectivity of the marginalized population. He argues that the event of conversion does not have a name, but it is the case of forcing a known name into the unknown realm of truths. This name, according to Choudhary, disassociates the subject of the event from the earlier name—'the untouchable', which, according to Ambedkar, "stinks" and institutes a new name, a new identity that was naturally anonymous or unknown. "A neo-name is not an unknown new name one invents; it is the unknown in the known names, the new in the historical roster of names one extracts as a generic particular 'neo-name'."¹⁹ Ambedkar, during the speech in Agra, advised Dalits to dissociate from any category reminiscent of untouchability.²⁰ Through the conversion of Dalits, he insinuated a militancy, as Badiou says in his book *Metapolitics*, by creating "a subjective determination without identity, or without concept."²¹ By dissociating from cultural identity, he demands an equal status for humanity. in accordance with universal ideas of justice and equality. This conversion marks a rupture in the continuity of oppressive history and challenges the ancient Hindu regime with a new name through the event of conversion. Ambedkar's appeal for a separate electorate prior to the Poona Pact, as well as his conversion to Buddhism, are moments in history that attempt to bring into existence those who are not counted in the political process. They are excluded; Ambedkar deliberately breaks the relation between identity and culture or caste through conversion, bringing into light the excluded parts of society. It is not only an assertion of the new name but a new life, as it was written in the pledge: "I believe I am entering the new life."²² Ambedkar uses Buddhism as a tool to

¹⁹ Shoumyabrata Choudhary, *Ambedkar and Other Immortals*, 106.

²⁰ Nicolas Jaoul, "Politics of Navayana Buddhism: Reinterpreting Ambedkar's Turn to Religion," in *Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*, ed. by Suraj Yengde et al. (India: Penguin Books, 2018), 286.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 142.

²² B.R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha Dhamma will be the savior of the World," in *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 17, Part 3 (New Delhi, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 1987), 532.

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assert the norm of equality. By exiting the Hindu fold, the Neo Buddhists got rid of their identity as low caste and became political subjects asserting the idea of equality.

Force of Truth in Ambedkar

Ambedkar relied heavily on the notion of force for manifesting the ideals of political actions. Scott Stroud, in his book *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India*, traces Ambedkar's notion of pragmatism starting from his student years in America to establishing the new school of Buddhism. He analyses how it differs from John Dewey's and others' notions of pragmatism, as well as the similarities it shares with them. Ambedkar argues that the notion of force is necessary to achieve the desired ends: "It must be remembered by those who are opposed to a force that without the use of it, all ideals will remain empty just as without some ideal or purpose (conscious or otherwise) all activity will be no more than mere fruitless fooling."²³ Ambedkar uses Dewey's distinction between force as violence and force as energy. The notion of force has a necessarily violent connotation; it implies that some ends can be achieved only by coercive force, such as the state implementing its laws. Ambedkar's idea of force is inclined towards force as 'an operation' — one that is exercised when there is a clear understanding of both means and ends. In Ambedkar's pragmatism, ends and means are not separate binaries; rather, each contributes to the other. As Stroud frames it,

... Ambedkar making a move integral to the sort of pragmatism he would develop in the coming decades through his activism: ends and means are not binary or separate, but instead they are closely connected and fall into different shades of synthesis. They imbue each other with meaning, and their value is interlinked.²⁴

This means that for Ambedkar, ends and means are not separate milestones to be achieved. Rather, in a more Buddhist way, the path is also the end that leads to a multitude of possible outcomes. We can say that ends, ideals, or truths are, in turn, truth procedures. Therefore, it means that the process of truth is merely an 'operation' of force. The void at the heart of any situation that allows being or the event to appear is the "operational void of

²³ B.R. Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste," 485.

²⁴ Scott R. Stroud, *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023), 86.

truth.”²⁵ That is to say, it is a possibility of truth that philosophy operates using a certain force; this force could be logical, persuasive, or axiomatic. In other words, the lack of truths is attempted to be filled with the compossibility of truths, that is, different or multiple ends, through appropriate, thoughtful means or processes. As Ambedkar suggests, the article attached to end “the” (the end) is wrong, as the end cannot be pre-emptively announced to be the only end. It is the operation of force and truth that allows a compossibility of truths. “The challenge lies in avoiding the violent use of force that implicates a rush toward an end that undoes other desired results or ends.”²⁶ Thus, force for Ambedkar is the effective means of operation. Let’s consider an example of a social organization. We can imagine that the organization consists of an artist, an engineer, a militant, a mathematician, and a scientist. Let us assume that all these members of an organization believe in a certain incomplete and unsayable truth. We can say that they laboriously conduct themselves with the discipline demanded by their own respective truth procedures. The task of a philosopher is not to prioritize one process over the other, not to undermine some processes, subsuming others. Rather, it is to find a possible space for these truths to exist. That is, in a sense, to force a space where these truths coexist. As Alain Badiou says: “I call a ‘truth procedure’ or a ‘truth’ an ongoing organization, in a given situation (or world), of the consequences of an event.”²⁷ This could be what Dewey meant by the intelligent use of force.

Dewey leaves open the possibility of the intelligent use of force. Indeed, in his lectures, he enunciates the unstable middle path of “coercive force,” a certain energy that we find emergent in organized groups. This sort of force, according to Dewey’s account, involves the coordination of individual energies and forces that produce the organization evident as custom and culture within a group. This gives, according to Dewey’s exposition, “a certain total collective force which is not coercive but simply identical with the fact of social organization.”²⁸

Kumar’s interpretation of force in Ambedkar is largely derived from Nietzsche’s notion of force that is

with a decidedly insurrectionary, even anarchic, theory of justice. A theory that would, in turn, institute, in Ambedkar’s thought and rhetoric alike, force as the seed

²⁵ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. by Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 124.

²⁶ Stroud, *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India*, 91.

²⁷ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010), 244.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

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of emancipation, incorruptible by the apparatuses and injunctions of the moral law. And this force is the strongest, most just, most positive, argues Ambedkar, when it is in the hands of the republic's weakest, wielded by its "spent and sacrificed people" alone.²⁹

Kumar argues that this notion of force is a form of force that allows the weakest of the society to ascertain their emancipation from the moral code of conduct. Ambedkar differentiates between the force applied by institutions such as the state and another force that is applied by society (moral policing). This latter force, applied by society and organizations, is much more effective because it is reinforced by religious and moral institutions. The Nietzschean force allows an individual to break free from this moral policing as an act of freedom, as a radical annihilation of restraining moral laws. Kumar brings out a salient feature of Ambedkar's notion of force, which is the distinction between 'just force' and 'brute force'.³⁰ Just force is when the principle of equality is presupposed in an act of insurgency performed by the weakest section of society. Here, equality is neither a goal nor an end; it just exists, and thus the force is justified. This force is generated through an acute awareness of vulnerability and a commitment to resist the wrong by institutions that claim to be egalitarian in spirit. Kumar defines three shifts in Ambedkar's theory of force: first, the force of annihilation that demands equality or *Samata*; second, the force of general mobilization; and third, the force of impermanence that is *Shunyata*.

Alain Badiou defines force as follows: "Forcing is the point at which a truth, although incomplete, authorizes anticipations of knowledge concerning not what is but what will have been if truth attains completion."³¹ For Badiou, as mentioned, truth is subtracted from the known. Truth is not in what is already known in the situation. Therefore, truth is incomplete and unsayable. Truth, when applied with force or the forcing of truth, is precisely, anticipation of knowledge. That is to say, forcing implies an operation that what is declared as true today will have become a part of knowledge. Choudhary argues that in the case of Ambedkar—specifically during the Mahad Satyagraha at Chavdar Lake—he prescribed the militant notion of truth by stating: "I am certain that no one who thinks of this meeting in this light will doubt that it is unprecedented."³² That is, after this event, whoever

²⁹ Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and The Risk of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 230.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

³¹ Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ray Brassier & Alberto Toscano (London: Bloomsbury Publication, 2015), 151.

³² Choudhary, *Ambedkar and Other Immortals*, 168.

declares that they are equal—as some people had declared the truth of equality at the Chavdar Lake in 1927— will be equal as no one will be unequal. That is to force the truth of equality into the infinite future.

Why Religion? / Ambedkar's Idea of Religion

One of the major points of contention between the Indian Marxists and Ambedkar's thought is the question of religion. Ambedkar fully accepted the goals and certain truths of communism (equality, abolition of private property, alienation, misery of existence) but differed in the means of achieving the same goals. Ambedkar even goes to the extent of accepting the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; however, he asks: how long can this dictatorship last? If it is to last till the 'withering away of the states,' what will follow after the state has withered away, anarchy? Ambedkar argues that when the violent force of the dictatorship of the proletariat is withdrawn, something else must take place to sustain the revolution— or an altogether different type of force is required to generate a social revolution. This force for Ambedkar was religion. He writes:

The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is Religion. But to the Communists, Religion is anathema. Their hatred of Religion is so deep-seated that they will not even discriminate between religions which are helpful to Communism and religions which are not. The Communists have carried their hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between the two.³³

For Ambedkar, religion was not only a concept but also there were religions as different forms of organizations—a social reality that can be evaluated, criticized, and meliorated. For him, some religions were worth more than some other religions. After evaluating some of the most significant religions in the world, Ambedkar chooses Buddhism as the model for an egalitarian society. Through his critique of Hinduism and his scholarship in Buddhism, he carved a new ideal of religion, namely, Navayana Buddhism. However, Ambedkar differentiates his notion of religion from natural theology and revealed religions. He does not fully agree with the liberal notion of religion, nor does he ascribe to the utilitarian notion of religion. For Ambedkar, the idea of religion is insistently rationalist, this-worldly, and primarily social rather than metaphysical. According to Ambedkar, the task

³³ B.R. Ambedkar, "Buddha and Karl Marx," in *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* Vol. 3 (Delhi: Ambedkar Foundation, 1987), 460.

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of religion is not to answer questions regarding the origin of the world or life after death, but it is to reconstruct the world for the betterment of human life on earth. His notion of religion can be extracted from how he distinguishes it from religion of rules and religion of principles, from the distinction between religion and philosophy, from his distinction between *Dhamma* and religion, and from the disposition vis-à-vis truth and knowledge.

Ambedkar's distinction between rules and principles

Ambedkar's texts, such as *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *Annihilation of Castes*, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, and *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, mark the trajectory of scholarship on religion that developed over time. On the one hand, he is facing an encounter with modern politics in terms of democracy, economic transformation, and modern social structures. On the other hand, he is dealing with the question of religion in modern democratic times. By dealing with the question of religion in terms of faith and justice, he attempted to formulate an ideology to support the foundations of democratic nations. As a modern scholar and political leader, Ambedkar laid the foundation of a new form of Buddhism. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is a culmination of all his speeches and scholarly work between 1936 and 1956. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he is anticipating the advent of democracy in India and evaluating Indian social conditions in the light of democracy. The discontinuation from religious domination to modern scientific society was a challenge rather than a simple transformation. "When I urge that these ancient rules of life be annulled, I am anxious that their place shall be taken by a religion of principles, which alone can lay claim to being a true religion."³⁴ Through this insightful statement, we can see that Ambedkar believed that the place of God in any religion must be replaced by moral principles. He has further argued that Buddhism is an atheistic religion that has certain principles as its foundation, rather than other-worldly metaphysics or gods.

Ambedkar converges his different thoughts to claim that Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, is a religion based on principles, not rules. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he differentiated the religion of rules from the religion of principles. He says,

Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things. Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to

³⁴ Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste," 76.

pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action.³⁵

For Ambedkar, the nature of following rules is mechanical, whereas principles—even if they are wrong—result in conscious, responsible acts. When one adheres to a principle as a justification for the act, the agent is solely responsible for the consequences of the action. By contrast, when one merely abides by rules, the agent can deny responsibility and put the onus of actions onto something else, such as God, priest or destiny. This distinction between rules and principles reflects the distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism. Throughout his work, we see Ambedkar relying on the notion of principles and religion of principles where the place of God is taken by certain principles, which could be summarized as ethical principles. To follow rules, one requires a force of external laws and norms; to believe in principles, one needs faith in and fidelity to one's own intelligence.

Dhamma as Religion without Religion

Ambedkar regarded *Dhamma* as different from other religions and different from the notion of religion itself. In one of his best philosophical works, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1956), Ambedkar redefined *Dhamma*. He gave it a new meaning not only in Buddhist tradition but also in redefining *Dhamma* by differentiating it from religion as a concept and arguing how *Dhamma* is not religion in the conceptual sense. First, Ambedkar argues that *Dhamma* is essentially social. Religion, it is understood, is a matter of one's personal beliefs, culture, habits, etc. But *Dhamma*, by definition, cannot be personal. "*Dhamma* is social. It is fundamentally and essentially so."³⁶ Ambedkar says that society needs *Dhamma*, and the relationship between man and man is a primary concern for *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* ensures liberty for all, whereas religion does not propose to do so. Religion is occupied with explaining the beginning of the world and how things came to be as a revelation; *Dhamma* is not concerned with the revelation of the origin of the world. The purpose of religion, according to Ambedkar, is to explain the origin of the world, whereas the purpose of *Dhamma* is to 'reconstruct the world.' Ambedkar further argues that there is no place for morality in religion, whereas "*morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is morality.*"³⁷ Morality or moral principles are the essence of *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* cannot be explained without moral principles. It is not to please God that *Dhamma* has to be moral; rather, it is for man's own good that *Dhamma* teaches compassion toward

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁶ Ambedkar, "The Buddha and His Dhamma," 179.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

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others. Religion is centered around God, the soul, prayers, worship, rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices. *Dhamma* does not demand humans to do rituals to please Gods or to ask for redemption. *Dhamma* teaches Love (*Karuna*) and understanding (*Prajna*) for man's own well-being in this life. However, as Ambedkar clarifies, this should not be misunderstood as the idea that morality guarantees the fulfillment of one's own personal interests. It is not the case that thieves lack morals, or businessmen are not moral, or that there is no morality within fellow members of the same caste; they, too, need morality. However, this morality is in favor of their personal interests or their group's interests. As Ambedkar argues, this morality is "marked by isolation and exclusiveness."³⁸ This morality is to protect and sustain the interests of their particular group within society, and therefore, this morality is anti-social. According to Ambedkar, if a society has different models and standards of morality for different groups of people, then that society will eventually lead to conflict. Therefore, at the center of any community there are common morals and ethics that are sacred for all. That is why morality must be essentially universal. This undoubtedly resonates with certain Kantian notions of universal morality. Kantian morality also promotes a certain subjective universal ethics of acts and duties. Yet the Kantian notion of ethics is *a priori* and transcendental. That is to say, the norms or the principles that the Kantian subject follows are transcendental and *a priori*, and the subject of will assumes them to be universal. For Ambedkar, one could say that morality—*Dhamma*—appears in situations when there are a relation and a conflict between man and man. Ambedkar's singular conception of *Dhamma* appears in situations where there is conflict—whether between one religion and another or between one nation against the other. In such situations of conflict, Ambedkar's *Dhamma*, which is not a religion, manifests as a universal morality grounded in brotherhood.

Conclusion

Ambedkar's notion of philosophy, as he has expressed in *Philosophy of Hinduism*, follows the following logic: Revolutions are the guiding light for philosophy. Philosophy must be dynamic like religion; it must not remain static but must change. It must not be content merely with knowing the truth, but also with loving it—that is, with inventing a path or a way of life. It must not be merely transcendental metaphysics; it should be immanent. Religion, in turn, is politics that is a 'Working Ethic.'³⁹ The analysis of Ambedkar's political truth process results in the ethics of a singular subjectivity that is

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, "Philosophy of Hinduism," in *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. 3*, 87.

inscribed in what can be called 'Dalit Buddhism.' What I have tried to do in this paper is to assert Ambedkar's political process through philosophical virtues proposed by Alain Badiou, such as unnameability and moderation. This exercise provides a new set of concepts to understand Ambedkar's exceptional and unnamable ethical discourse. I have tried to show that Ambedkar, in his insights in *Annihilation of Caste*, exhibits the four determinations of truths—will, equality, courage, and authority—which are the foundations of his singular ethics. Through an analysis of Choudhary's work, we find that Ambedkar's Mahad conference and later his conversion to Buddhism were political events imbuing subjectivity in anyone and everyone who attests to the event as an event. Through Kumar and Stroud's work, I have analyzed that Ambedkar's notion of truth—coupled with his explanation of means and ends—results in rendering Ambedkar's idea of truth as operational; that is, truth is asserted as an operation on the void of the situation. Consequently, Ambedkar's notion of ethics has emerged as an exception to the situation as a singularity. In such a world situation, Ambedkar chooses Buddhism as a religion without God. Ethical principles must be based on these atheistic foundations. In such ethics, he suggests that the subject must be educated under the light of Buddhist principles. That is, it must fundamentally have faith in the equality of intelligence. Ambedkar attempts to think of religion under the paradigm of modernity: the death of God.

For Ambedkar, ethics is the question of Good and Evil, the event of conversion results in singularly ethical principles that emerge as an exception to the world/situation. Through this conversion, a liturgy of Dalit Buddhism emerges as a possible mode of existence. This insistence on ethical principles is due to Ambedkar's singular political truths that are at once collective and universal. The conversion of approximately 500,000 Dalits toward a newly embraced existence in Buddhism represented a significant political event in Ambedkar's life. This political event reveals the systemic injustices inflicted upon the untouchables, who have now resolved to align themselves with the emergent principles of justice and equality. This political event initiates the affirmation and delineation of the truth concerning the collective subject, which is embodied in the Buddhist *Sangha* as an organizational entity. It is not the individual *Bhikkhu* who relinquishes private property, but rather the *Sangha* that espouses the abolition of private property as a mechanism to achieve social equality. An ethical tenet of the *Sangha* is to educate the subjects through a commitment to Buddhist principles:

The liturgy of the emancipated sangha is also a service of thought of principles embodied in a world of reciprocal and egalitarian dispositions. 'Education' is the name of an

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intellectual liturgy on behalf of the intellect itself, insofar as the latter is not a measurable individual attribute but a universal world of dispositions.⁴⁰

Education here does not mean institutional education; rather, as Badiou puts it, political education means 'getting schooled by an event,'⁴¹ which means constructing ideas based on real political events by studying and analyzing them. With these measures, the goal is to 'educate the masses by themselves, (or after the event, through the event). This education, according to great leaders like Mao, will lead people to discern between just and unjust, true and untrue and good and evil. It is not just Mao, but Saint Just, The Buddha, Saint Kabeer, or Babasaheb Ambedkar who teaches the principle of 'be your own light.' This is the capacity to think, to discern between just and unjust. To think as equals and not under any monopoly of thought or violence.

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⁴⁰ Shoumybrata Choudhary, "Comparative Liturgy: A Study of New Congregations," in *Liberation Theology and Dalit Buddhism, Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 12 (Winter 2025), 45.

⁴¹ Bruno Bosteels, "Translators Introduction," in *Can Politics be Thought?* trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Duke University Press, 2018), 11.

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