

## BOOK REVIEW

**Scott R. Stroud. *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction*. Chicago, IL: HarperCollins, 2023.**

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This book review delivers an informative summary of Scott R. Stroud's *The Evolution of Pragmatism: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction* in India. The work underscores Ambedkar's pragmatic stance on societal matters and his profound intellectual appreciation for the teachings of John Dewey. The review acknowledges Stroud's thorough examination, which stresses Ambedkar's strategic utilisation of persuasion and his continuing impact on Indian politics and societal transformation. Overall, the book has garnered recognition as an indispensable resource for understanding Ambedkar's enduring influence and his substantial contributions to the scholarly and political arenas of India.

While all books are important, this one focuses on an individual who taught democracy to a nation like India. Despite encountering various forms of societal injustice, Ambedkar persevered and did not succumb to defeat. He made every effort to eradicate social issues such as caste discrimination and untouchability. *The Evolution of Pragmatism* in India consists of five chapters, each emphasising different facets of Ambedkar's character. The book highlights Ambedkar's manifestation of pragmatism, emphasising his approach to addressing specific challenges using available resources, rather than relying on grand narratives or major political changes. Stroud underscores the significant impact of Dewey on Ambedkar's intellectual development. Ambedkar publicly acknowledged that Dewey greatly shaped his intellectual curiosity, stating that he owes all of his intellectualism to Dewey. This section explores how Ambedkar's beliefs developed following his time abroad in 1910, and how his intellectualism influenced his policy decisions, particularly

regarding casteism and untouchability. Dewey, a renowned pragmatic figure, played an important role in introducing Ambedkar to this intellectual strategy, which later had a notable influence on Indian politics (Bargi 2022).

The author offers a comprehensive narrative in a chapter entitled “Ambedkar and Dewey at Columbia University”, detailing the profound impact Ambedkar experienced during his time as a philosophy student at Columbia University in the US, where he was mentored by the esteemed American philosopher Dewey. Though lacking a reputation for elegance in speech, Dewey was a profound intellect of his era. He was able to provide his students with what the author appropriately refers to as “seed ideas” because of his exceptional ability to engage with complex concepts. He often took time to reflect on a subject before speaking. These initial “seed ideas”, though seemingly unnoticed at first, had the potential to evolve into deep intellectual revelations and transformative philosophies.

Despite limitations in Dewey’s speech, his educational lessons were characterised by an atmosphere of intellectual rigour and curiosity. Ambedkar, an astute and perceptive learner, absorbed Dewey’s ideas, recognising their intrinsic value. Ambedkar’s intellectual journey was greatly influenced by Dewey’s teaching methods and the substance of his ideas. The concepts taught by Dewey in these classes eventually became essential tools in Ambedkar’s fight against the entrenched social injustices of casteism in India (Iyer 1991).

Ambedkar’s ability to grasp these foundational concepts and use them to challenge casteism highlights his intellectual acumen and dedication to transforming society. Under Dewey’s guidance, Ambedkar established these concepts as the basis for his vision of a fair and just society in India. With this intellectual foundation, Ambedkar was able to challenge the status quo, advocate for the rights and dignity of oppressed people, and ultimately draft the Constitution of India, which enshrines principles of social justice and equality. Dewey’s ideas had a significant impact on Ambedkar’s intellectual growth. These “seed ideas” acted as the catalyst for Ambedkar’s efforts to dismantle caste-based prejudice and promote a more inclusive and equitable society in India. This chapter emphasises the vital importance of education, mentorship, and the exchange of ideas in shaping history and advancing social change. Ambedkar was so impressed by Dewey that he authored numerous research papers published in various journals. These articles reveal his understanding of India’s economy, society, and social structures.

The book emphasises Ambedkar’s comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature by philosophers such as Russell and Dewey, particularly focusing on addressing India’s unique challenges, especially untouchability.

His reviews and articles show his deliberate attempt to engage with foreign writers to integrate their ideas into his own work, aiming to tackle social issues in India (Michael 2007). This book provides an in-depth exploration within a specific context, highlighting Ambedkar's efforts to employ foreign philosophical ideas to tackle certain obstacles faced by India. Ambedkar's focus on untouchability was deeply personal, having experienced it since childhood and witnessed others suffer from it. Ambedkar was profoundly affected by this issue and vowed to combat this social evil through every action. However, despite these efforts, this social evil has yet to be completely eradicated in India.

The author describes how Ambedkar utilised Dewey's theories and his own brand of pragmatism to challenge the injustices perpetuated by the Indian caste system in the 1930s. Ambedkar employed a multifaceted approach to addressing caste inequality. He believed that simply entering temples or other public spaces was insufficient for achieving victory for Dalits. Instead, his goal was to eliminate the entrenched prejudices and emotions associated with caste and untouchability in people's minds. Ambedkar's views on religion, caste, and untouchability were likely based on his belief that true societal change required a profound shift in people's mindsets and convictions. He recognised that mere legislative changes or gaining access to specific areas would not be enough to eradicate the deeply ingrained biases and discrimination linked to the caste system. Thus, his approach aimed at achieving a more profound and enduring transformation in society.

The author contrasts Ambedkar's ideology with that of Mahatma Gandhi concerning the caste system. Gandhi had a different viewpoint on the caste system and untouchability, and his method of social reform diverged from Ambedkar's. In a chapter entitled "Education, Force, and the Will to Convert", Ambedkar's eloquence and persuasiveness are discussed, especially regarding legislative debates and the Conversion Movement. Ambedkar, an instrumental figure in drafting the Indian Constitution and a champion of social reform, was renowned for his compelling rhetoric and persuasive abilities.

Ambedkar's emphasis on logical reasoning and persuasion as a "gentle force" demonstrates his tactical approach to promoting causes and bringing about societal change. If this chapter examines the period from 1930 to the Conversion Movement, it likely covers an essential part of Ambedkar's life, during which he actively dedicated himself to improving oppressed communities and eradicating social inequalities. During this time, Ambedkar engaged in parliamentary debates and discussions, advocating for the

rights and dignity of Dalits and other oppressed communities through his eloquence and logical reasoning. His efforts culminated in the Conversion Movement, during which he and his followers adopted Buddhism to renounce the caste-based prejudices inherent in Hinduism. The author delves into Ambedkar's strategic use of persuasion, not only in parliamentary settings but also through public speeches and publications, to build a compelling case for social justice and equality. This involves examining specific speeches, discussions, and writings, highlighting the rhetorical techniques and persuasive strategies Ambedkar employed.

In this book, Ambedkar's role as a persuasive speaker and how his efforts shaped the social and political developments of his time are likely particularly insightful. It demonstrates the power of words and ideas in influencing individual perspectives and broader cultural norms. The author examines the complex aspects of human nature and the concept that "man is a dynamic being". This idea underscores the evolving nature of individuals, their growth, and how their views and beliefs may change through interactions with others. Regarding the Conversion Movement, the author explains why Ambedkar embraced Buddhism and why, in his speeches, he consistently appealed to people to convert from Hinduism to Buddhism.

According to this book, if a leader's intentions are genuinely aimed at the welfare of the people, then the public will listen. These traditional intellectual traditions have profoundly shaped people's views of the world and their place within it. The text explores the core ideas of these ideologies and their relevance in modern society. Another sub-theme is the significance of effective communication. It emphasises the importance of communication as a vital tool for exchanging ideas, fostering understanding, and building connections. The author examines the role of communication in individual development and societal growth.

Finally, the author provides a detailed analysis of the concept of social democracy. This notion, associated with egalitarianism, highlights the importance of equality, social justice, and the well-being of all members of society. The chapter explores the practical implications of democratic governance and its impact on different societies worldwide.

Overall, this book offers a thorough exploration of Ambedkar's views on democracy, pragmatism, and untouchability. It provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of their significance and applicability in the broader context of human existence and society. It is accurate to say that despite the years since Ambedkar's passing, untouchability still persists in India. The issue of casteism has diminished, but it has not been

entirely eradicated. In these circumstances, it is crucial to produce literature encapsulating Ambedkar's ideologies. This will promote societal awareness and work towards eradicating any form of discrimination, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or linguistic differences.

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