ON STROUD'S AMBEDKAR

"The Evolution of Pragmatism in India",
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It is no exaggeration to say that Scott Stroud's book on Ambedkar was the most anticipated scholarly treatment of Ambedkar's philosophy, among the half dozen or so books that have been published in the last couple of years. Stroud's essays on Ambedkar and his relationship with Deweyan Pragmatism have been much discussed over the years, and this book is to be welcomed for its sustained argument linking Ambedkar's ideas with the pragmatism of his teacher John Dewey. Stroud follows Ambedkar from his days at Columbia University to his death and after-the response to his 'conversion'-but always under the intellectual shadow of John Dewey. If the promise of the book was that it would study the reception of Dewey's ideas in Ambedkar's thought, then Stroud succeeds, although sometimes at the cost of obscuring, if not flattening Ambedkar's own voice.

Dewey's imprint on Ambedkar's thought is here shown from one of his earliest writings, a review of Bertrand Russell's Principles of Social Reconstruction, Ambedkar's submissions before the Southborough Committee, the intellectual bombshell that was the Annihilation of Caste, all the way to his *Buddha and His Dhamma* and the 'conversion' to Buddhism, of his own and his close to half a million Dalit followers. Dewey's thought helps Ambedkar build what Stroud helpfully terms his 'Navayana Pragmatism'. The book is a relentless quellenforchung, tracing the ideas of Dewey in Ambedkar's speeches, and the memories of Dewey in Ambedkar's experience. Stroud unearths the marginalia of books, Dewey's class syllabi, notes, transcripts, lectures, conversations, and anything else which might give a clue to Dewey's influence on a young Ambedkar. This is matched in good measure with Ambedkar's reception of these learnt ideas in his speeches, submissions, writings, etc. but mostly it is Ambedkar in his oral mode that Stroud is interested in, which could be due to his background in communication and rhetoric. Such is the closeness of Stroud's reading, that the reader might be forgiven for thinking if any of Ambedkar's more important ideas are products of his own mind. Despite Stroud's assertions about the creativeness of Ambedkar's use of, and his resistance to certain Deweyan ideas, one leaves with the sense that Ambedkar's thought is almost completely derivative, and, dare I say, almost second-rate. A major reason for this impression is the near-total absence of Ambedkar's political and historical writings in Stroud's analysis. Works such as Who Were the Shudras, Who Were the Untouchables, his critiques of Gandhianism and the Indian National Congress, his books on India's Partition and the creation of Pakistan, and even unpublished manuscripts like Philosophy of Hinduism and Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto are scarcely mentioned. This omission undermines any attempt to write a comprehensive study in the history of political philosophy or an intellectual biography—both of which The Evolution of Pragmatism in India purports to be. Stroud claims to have provided "a historically informed account of what Ambedkar's philosophy looks like if we are sensitive to its extensions, adaptations, and resistances to themes in Dewey's complex thought" (p.14). However, an intellectual biography of Ambedkar—or any major figure—cannot be adequately written with reference to only one thinker. Stroud seems aware of this limitation and adopts a notably broad approach to intellectual biography. To justify his focused examination of Dewey's influence on Ambedkar, Stroud suggests that we could similarly benefit from exploring the impact of other thinkers—such as Edwin Seligman, Vladimir Simkhovitch, Gabriel Tarde, and Henri Bergson—on Ambedkar, as all are referenced in his work. This suggests that the book is more accurately a study of the reception of a major

philosopher (Dewey) in Ambedkar's thought, rather than a comprehensive intellectual biography.

Yet there are further issues. Among the figures Stroud mentions, only Bergson is a philosopher widely recognized today, either within or outside academic circles. This raises the question of how Ambedkar, as a philosopher, would reconcile the seemingly divergent philosophies of Bergson and Dewey. Given Stroud's method of detecting the influence of Dewey on Ambedkar through devices like "echoing"—not through explicit identification but by selectively highlighting certain ideas or phrases from thinkers as diverse as Marx, Plato, or Burke—it is worth considering how a Marxist, Burkean, or Platonist Ambedkar might coexist with a pragmatist Ambedkar, given the typical incompatibility of these philosophical tendencies.

A note about method

While scholars have the right to frame their research questions as they see fit, Stroud's narrow focus on Ambedkar's speeches turns out to have overlooked the full range of Ambedkar's intellectual contributions. There are many instances within Ambedkar's broader body of work—particularly in his books and unpublished writings—where a more nuanced and deeper understanding of his pragmatist moves in forging an Indian historical sociology could be explored. Ironically, Stroud's case for Ambedkar's pragmatist leanings might have been even stronger had he drawn from the wealth of material that extends beyond the political speeches he focuses on. His narrower approach of studying the rhetor Ambedkar, misses opportunities to capture the richness and complexity of his ideas. Even the speeches that Stroud examines, while historically significant, were often delivered in contexts of political maneuvering, lobbying, and public persuasion. Ambedkar, as a politician and reformer, naturally tailored these speeches to specific audiences according to the occasion.

Ambedkar, Pragmatist?

Stroud's method of assigning philosophical labels based on what he calls "echoing" can be problematic. For instance, if instead of Dewey's concept of "associated life," Ambedkar had drawn upon a poetic expression used by, say, the Mughal Emperor Babur to analyze caste dynamics in India, would it be reasonable to classify Ambedkar within the Timurid literary tradition? Babur had observed that the caste men and women of India lack *ikhtilaat-e-amizish* (social intercourse or mingling) and *amad-o-raft* (interaction, literally "comings and goings"). (Thackston 1996) Though observed in the course of writing an autobiography, this is still a sociological description of caste society that is arguably more germane to Hindu caste society than Dewey's "associated life."

Of course, Ambedkar's theoretical tools are sharp enough that he would not need to reference the leisurely musings of a pre-modern Turkic prince. Ambedkar's paper Castes in India: Their Genesis and Mechanism had delved much deeper into the subject than most anthropological scholarship on caste of his time. I mention Babur only to complicate Stroud's understanding of thinking about influence and reception. I think we must differentiate between what Stroud calls echoing, with agreement with an author's particular ideas and the rather different case such as the substantial acceptance of a philosophical theory. Although Ambedkar might agree with a pragmatist idea that beliefs are not just abstract mental states but tools that guide practical actions, his agreement doesn't make him a pragmatist in the same sense that it makes Frank Ramsey a pragmatist. There is, first, the question of whether Ambedkar is even a philosopher, which requires a satisfactory answer.

Yet, it was after reading Stroud's quotation-heavy book, that I found myself reconsidering the nature of Ambedkar's intellectual project and how might we understand the nature of his corpus. How should we categorize Ambedkar? Is he after all, a philosopher? A political theo-

rist? A sociologist of caste? What is the gain in classifying him as a pragmatist, when he doesn't identify himself as such? A glance at his vast body of work and the range of his book titles reveals that if he is a philosopher (say when he reconstructs, or rather invents a materialist, revisionist Buddhism), it is only one facet of his much larger identity. If he a political theorist, then what are his normative political positions on questions he writes about, such as democracy, nation, minority, etc? Would he have written differently if the facts of Indian political life between 1920 and 1954 had been different? For example, Ambedkar's understanding of what a minority is, comes out of his advocacy for Dalits, who were at the bottom of the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system. Ambedkar had to fashion this notion of minority in the service of his community, an 'impossible category to realize' as Anupama Rao calls it. (Rao, 2009) Stroud's focus on Dewey's influence on Ambedkar certainly highlights his philosophical borrowings, but the limited uptake, development and advancement of Dewey's ideas within Ambedkar's work will allow detractors to question the value of his philosophical contributions.

So, while Stroud's portrayal serves to position him within the canon of pragmatist philosophers, I would argue that Ambedkar is better understood as a philosophically trained founder of an Indian historical sociology, in the tradition of thinkers like Ibn Khaldun or Emile Durkheim (incidentally Dewey might approve and commend this role for philosophy). This might seem unconventional, and I do not insist on this as an exclusive characterization. Instead, I use it to highlight how Ambedkar applied his philosophical education to theorize about caste, tackle the specific social ills of his time, in order to reconstruct a social science for the Indian present and future. Much like Ibn Khaldun drew upon Greco-Arabic thought or Emile Durkheim incorporated both Aristotelian and Enlightenment traditions from Descartes to Kant (Dale 2015, 278), Ambedkar's intellectual work combined philosophical rigor with a deep analysis of social structures and historical conditions, but his sight always remained affixed on the question of caste.

For example, Ambedkar's analysis of the caste system's persistence—his argument that the caste system endures because even low castes seek to dominate those lower than them—mirrors the structure of Rousseau's argument in his Discourse on Inequality, and clearly seems informed by him. When talking about how the poor welcome inequality instead of getting rid of it, Rousseau writes that Citizens "consent to bear chains in order that they may impose chains [on others] in turn." (Rousseau 2019, 188) Ambedkar's argument is that the gradational structure of caste hierarchy allows even middling castes to dominate lower castes and the lower castes to dominate the lowest, i.e. untouchables, thereby reinforcing the system. To this, Ambedkar adds, in his characteristic pithiness, that the *varnavyavastha* is a gradation of castes forming "an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt" (BAWS Vol 7, 26).

In the *AoC,* Ambedkar employs another metaphor from the social sciences, which he fashions to his particular needs. For Ambedkar, the caste system in India is more than a functional division of work or roles within society, it is not just a 'division of labor' (a metaphor made famous by Adam Smith, and having a rich antecedent history as well), but a *division of labourers*. The Caste-system rigidly assigns people to specific occupations based on their birth, thus enforcing a social order that locks individuals into fixed roles. Value and dignity, or the lack of it, is accorded to these inherited roles, or birth. I do not think that Ambedkar's appropriation of Deweyan ideas is qualitatively much different from these examples of borrowings from enlightenment age philosophers. But with Stroud, and with Meera Nanda and Arun Mukherjee, I agree that Dewey's influence is much the larger.

"Associated Life"

Now, coming to how Stroud captures this reception. He writes that Ambedkar's reception of Dewey's thought, "was not complete, … while Ambedkar echoed some of

the Deweyan texts that he owned, he purposely selected and reconstructed those portions of Dewey's expansive thought that might prove useful for his own purposes, and he rejected or resisted other parts of Dewey's philosophy that he heard or read." The device of echoing allowed Ambedkar to appropriate from Dewey as much as Marx or the Buddha. This sounds uncontroversial as it stands, but it is Stroud's particular examples that one can quarrel with. In Chapter 1, Stroud tries to show the imprint of Dewey's psychological ethics, his understanding of the individual as a socialized self, "bearing habits and integrating with its…environment, social and natural", and the influence of the "all kinds of social arrangements, organisms and institutions, and man's moral ideas and judgments." (p. 41) We are informed that Ambedkar's year-long study with Dewey helped equip him with the tools to analyze and address the specific nature of social conflict, particularly the dynamic between society and the individual that he would encounter upon his return to India. This is a very useful suggestion, and it also aligns with my own view laid down above. The chapter is the strongest in the book and is especially valuable for its reconstruction of Dewey's course syllabus, which later evolved into his *Human Nature and Conduct*, among other texts. But we could push Stroud's notion of echoing further, to see if instead of echoing, which Ambedkar certainly does, he creatively transforms, redescribes or redeploys Deweyan language.

We know that Ambedkar borrows Dewey's phrase "associated life" but I do not think his usage quite echoes Dewey's naturalistic understanding of social organism and its interaction with morality, as Stroud suggests in the chapter. Instead, Ambedkar seems to use the term as a stock phrase when discussing the '*terms* of co-existence in a caste society' (BAWS 5, 21, *italics mine*). Whatever its salience was in Phil 132 or Phil 231 while studying with Dewey, Ambedkar seems to be evolving this expression into a contract-metaphor. Such usage appears when he is discussing the question of suffrage. In Ambedkar's imagination, granting a person the right to vote essentially means empowering them to determine the conditions under which they will coexist with others in society. Given this understanding of suffrage, it is unreasonable to confer this power solely on the higher classes, often the intellectuals or the propertied classes, while leaving the lower classes subject to their discretion. Ambedkar wants to say that the act of voting is not just a privilege, but a means of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their social or economic status, have a say in shaping the societal dynamics they are a part of. "They, too, must have the power to regulate the *terms of associated life*," Ambedkar writes. (BAWS Vol. 2, 559, *italics mine*)

Ambedkar's particular usage of Dewey's 'associated life' can be explained by the pre-Independence milieu of inter-communal struggle marked by seeking protections and privileges for one's own community on the occasion of achieving franchise. Democracy came to be construed as power-sharing among groups—and Ambedkar's marginalized Dalit community could have been left out by being counted within the Hindus. In his turn, Ambedkar argued that vulnerable groups must have a say in setting the terms of societal interaction, especially when they have historically been oppressed. He believed that the poorer and more vulnerable an individual or group, the greater their need to participate in democracy, to avoid being subject to the whims of the powerful majority (BAWS Vol. 2, 338), and the Dalits were marginalized in more ways than that. Extending this logic to labor relations, Ambedkar argued for power-sharing between capitalists and workers, and the right to negotiate and set the terms of their engagement. (BAWS Vol. 2, 559).

Unlike the traditional social contract theorists, who imagined pre-political individuals coming together to form society, Ambedkar saw caste as a pre-existing social reality that defined social relationships even before the formation of a modern state. Thus, he argued that any meaningful reform in India needed to renegotiate the social contract among castes, rather than merely between

individuals and the state. Beyond the exigencies of political struggle, if we were to think about Ambedkar's theoretical project, I think it would be far more productive to see Ambedkar's insights on the "terms of associated life" as a shift in the traditional understanding of the social contract. While classic theories often focus on a social contract or *Gesellschaftsvertrag* between individuals and the state or a contract of rulership (Herrschaftsvertrag) legitimizing authority between rulers and the people (Lessnoff 1986, 28), Ambedkar can be seen as bringing attention to a different kind of social contract, perhaps even a return to its early 17th century understanding. As a consequence of renegotiating a social contract between distinct social groupings like castes, Ambedkar sought mechanisms that allowed for power-sharing and autonomy for marginalized castes. His advocacy for separate electorates, proportional representation, and other forms of political safeguards was an attempt to ensure that the "terms of associated life" were not dictated solely by the dominant castes. Ambedkar's approach to democracy was thus informed by a recognition that different social groups needed to actively participate in setting the conditions for their mutual coexistence. Elsewhere, I have characterized Ambedkar, following Arend Lijphart, as a proponent of Consociational Democracy (Lijphart 1969).

Rhetorical Reconstruction and Echoing

For Stroud, 'Ambedkar's appropriation of Dewey's words and ideas can be best seen as a rhetorical method of reconstruction' (p. 120). Stroud calls this "technique of appropriating the text of Dewey in novel arguments" *echoing*, since it purposefully repeats some of what was uttered previously in a new context. Let us examine an example of this process from Chapter 3. For Stroud, echoing involves revising a text through 'slight changes or entropic degradations', and 'the echoed text is not often announced as echoed' (p. 117), it simply uses a selection of previous material in the new context of advocacy.' Stroud's suggestion that Ambedkar "echoed" Dewey's writings for rhetorical purposes seems uncontroversially true, but his tethering of the label pragmatism to Ambedkar as a result of these rhetorical strategies overlooked a very simple point: Ambedkar did not limit himself to echoing Dewey. Therefore, I return to my earlier worry about the incoherence of a Pragmatist Ambedkar and a Burkean Ambedkar inhabiting one author. In some of the examples that Stroud uses to demonstrate this practice of 'echoing' Dewey, Stroud ignores Ambedkar's use of figures quite distant from pragmatist the tradition. In one of Stroud's detailed treatments of a passage from Annihilation of caste, Ambedkar quotes Dewey's statement that '"Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse... As a society becomes more enlightened, it realized that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better society." (BAWS Vol. 1, 79) This is a famous passage. Stroud claims that Ambedkar is not 'merely relaying the passage', but 'using and sculpting that text to fit his needs and context.' Stroud makes much of the comparison between Ambedkar's language and Dewey's original passage to demonstrate Ambedkar's 'reconstructive method'. The problem for Stroud's characterization is that in the very next line Ambedkar writes, 'Even Burke, in spite of the vehemence with which he opposed the principle of change embodied in the French Revolution, was compelled to admit that "a State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve." What Burke said of a State applies equally to a society. (BAWS Vol. 1, 79)' Ambedkar's point is plain, that damaging and harmful practices ought to be discarded, and it is not something particular to Deweyan pragmatism, and this tendency to employ the pragmatist label upon mere

quotation of Dewey, seems rather forced. In response to Stroud's question, "Why does Ambedkar echo Dewey's words and passages in such creative ways?", a straightforward, unembellished answer is that it serves as one method for him to enrich his writings with the language of prominent thinkers, contributing to his larger goal of constructing a historical sociology of caste.

But there is a more substantial point in the passage above as well, Ambedkar's stance is not about conserving or fixing parts of tradition, as Stroud takes it; rather, it's about rejecting an entire self-reinforcing system that he believes cannot be reformed.

When discussing the resources which can be pragmatically reconstrued from the Shstras-the Hindu religious scriptures, Stroud writes about how Ambedkar is "keen to sustain Dewey's emphasis on how we reconstructively engage with texts that our tradition has preserved" (p.124) In an earlier article, Stroud had meditated on this idea at length, 'What remains common to Dewey and Ambedkar, however, is the pragmatist urge to not throw out everything from one's past tradition; one must save what is useful, fix what is damaged, and abandon that which is harmful. In other words, one does not revolt against the past in the present, one reconstructs the past for the needs of the present. This is why Ambedkar planned on asking his high-caste audience of reformers in this 1936 speech to abandon pernicious shastras or sacred texts in an attempt to change the religiously infused mental habits that result in caste separation." (Stroud, 2018, 11) Stroud's claim that Ambedkar urged his high-caste audience of reformers to abandon only the "pernicious" shastras implied a distinction between harmful and benign texts in Ambedkar's view. However, this interpretation misunderstood Ambedkar's argument in Annihilation of Caste (1936). Ambedkar argued that because of the deep entanglement between Hinduism and the caste system, Hindus should abandon their religious faith, reject the religious texts, and, in essence, cease to be Hindus in any recognizable traditional sense. While Ambedkar wished the reformers luck in their efforts, he was ultimately skeptical about their chances of success. Stroud overlooks this critical aspect of Ambedkar's thinking.

Ambedkar's intention was not simply to reform the shastras but to fundamentally reject Hinduism's entire foundation. He had already signaled his intention to convert to another religion in his earlier speech, Mukti Kon Pathe ("Which Path to Salvation?"), where he encouraged his Mahar followers to do the same—a move Stroud also notes. Ambedkar's argument is that even partial belief in the shastras upholds the entire caste-based system, making selective reform impossible. Ambedkar's view is that because caste is so deeply intertwined with Hinduism's scripturally sanctioned social-structure and salvific eschatology, the entire tradition must be discarded. He writes, "the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate. This is what I meant when I said you must discard the authority of the shastras and destroy the religion of the shastras" (BAWS Vol. 1, 78). In its place, he proposed the establishment of a singular, authoritative religious text (for people who wish to continue to identify as Hindus) and suggested legal penalties for propagating doctrines from traditional Hindu scriptures. His revolutionary antagonism against religion and toward secular uplift is clear. Ambedkar believed that religious teachings could not be selectively reformed, as the pernicious elements were inseparable from the whole. This is why, even in his formulation of Navayana Buddhism, there are almost no references to supernatural phenomena, marking his complete departure from traditional religious structures.

One example which Stroud briefly discusses from AoC, but doesn't dwell on, might be helpful in showing readers the pragmatic possibilities in Ambedkar, beyond the influence of quoting pragmatist texts (such as Dewey's *Democracy and Education*). In discussing this example, Stroud, in effect, repudiates his earlier view (2018) that Ambedkar's pragmatism allowed for the possibility

of retaining something valuable from his received Hindu tradition. (pp. 177-180)

For Ambedkar, the meaning of religio-philosophical terms in the Indic tradition, such as jati, varna, karma, and dharma is not only defined by religious texts and religious scholars but also shaped by the lived practices and beliefs of the people. In the AoC, Ambedkar applies a kind of pragmatic test to critique the so-called reformist strategies of the founder of the Hindu reformist group, the Arya Samaj. He does this by unraveling the supposed distinction between caste and varna, showing that the Arya Samajist aspiration to reduce thousands of castes into four Vedic varnas based on worth (guna), instead of birth in a caste (jati) is a failure in practice. Stroud engages with this critique but doesn't cash out properly perhaps one of Ambedkar's clearly pragmatist moves.

The founder of Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati, in his *Satyartha Prakash* or Light of Truth, had claimed that caste should be based on merit, not birth. Remember that the strategy is to ameliorate the injustices of untouchability and caste domination while retaining the language of Varna or Caste. He suggests that anyone, regardless of birth, can become a Brahmin through the acquisition of certain virtues and knowledge. Saraswati cites examples like the sage Javal, born of unknown parentage, who became a Brahmin, and Vishwamitra, a Kshatriya by birth, who was later accepted as a Brahmin. This position, on the surface, appears meliorist, but Ambedkar identifies its flaw. He argues that retaining caste labels like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, even when linked to merit rather than birth, perpetuates the old hierarchical system. The labels carry deeply entrenched associations with status and hierarchy, which cannot be easily eradicated.

Ambedkar's critique is rooted in a pragmatic understanding of social structures. He recognizes that the meaning of social terms such as caste names is determined not by their origins or ideal forms but by their everyday use in society, which reinforces the hierarchy they represent. For Ambedkar, reform cannot succeed if it retains the very symbols and names that perpetuate caste-based discrimination. He writes:

"So long as these names continue, Hindus will continue to think of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra as hierarchical divisions of high and low, based on birth, and act accordingly. The Hindu must be made to unlearn all this. But how can this happen if the old labels remain and continue to recall to his mind old notions?" (BAWS Vol. 1, p 59)

I think this may qualify for a genuine pragmatist analysis. As David Hildebrand notes regarding Dewey, what really mattered was that terms, concepts, and propositions be judged by their consequences in inquiry. For Ambedkar, this test is applied not just to philosophical inquiry but to social and political reform. He is concerned with the practical outcomes of ideas, not their ideal forms or coherence with traditional interpretations. Ambedkar's pragmatism is thus a tool for assessing the effectiveness of ideas in promoting social justice, and in this case, he finds the Arya Samaj's reform efforts inadequate. A transformation of values and attitudes requires a transformation of social structure, even if it means doing it by discarding names. By contrast, Saraswati's approach—reinterpreting the Vedas to justify social equality while retaining caste labels—falls short in Ambedkar's eyes because it allows for hierarchical ideas to sneak back in. As Stroud also notes, "names and labels are concretizations of habits of actions, reaction and judgment. They are normative, in other words. In the caste matrix, caste labels become associated with the extreme valuing and devaluing that grounds the harmful actions and reaction of caste individuals to each other, or of policies and institutions to members of a certain group or class." (p.179)

The test is pragmatic as Ambedkar assesses the consequences of their proposals, rather than their coherence or historical origins, and finds them wanting. The Arya Samaj's emphasis on merit-based caste reform, while theoretically progressive, would ultimately fail because the caste labels themselves reinforce the very hierarchy

the reform seeks to dismantle. Ambedkar sees the use of these terms in practice as inseparable from their oppressive connotations, and thus rejects the entire framework. In a way, Ambedkar calls for revolutionary means due to pragmatist reasons.

According to Stroud, Ambedkar proposes that the solution to dismantling the problematic mental attitudes and habits of caste lies in "conversion and the adoption of new identities," specifically through embracing Buddhism—more precisely, Navayana Buddhism. Here, I wish to highlight what I term the "Navayana conundrum." This refers to the puzzle of how Ambedkar's Navayana, or "New Vehicle" Buddhism, can be termed a conversion. Typically, conversion implies adopting an established religion, even if that religion no longer has a significant presence in terms of followers. However, Ambedkar redefined nearly every key concept from classical Buddhist schools, infusing Buddhism with entirely new ideas often borrowed from other traditions and philosophies. Given such a radical reworking, in what sense can Navayana still be called Buddhism?

This is a contentious and provocative question that remains largely unaddressed by scholars like Stroud. Ambedkar rejects the Four Noble Truths, which are common to all major philosophical sects of Buddhism, hence serving as the foundational framework of the Buddha's teachings across different sects across time and space. They represent the core understanding of human suffering and the path to its cessation, and all Buddhist schools—Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna—acknowledge and build upon them. Life for Ambedkar, maybe marked by *dukkha*, but for him it means suffering or pain proper, not the Buddhist notion of dissatisfaction or unsatisfactoriness on account of impermanence, change or decay. The cause for suffering for Ambedkar is class antagonism, exploitation and domination, not *tanha* or craving or desire, which leads to attachment, which in turn is responsible for birth, death, rebirth in the cycle of *samsara,* regulated by Karma. By discarding the karma-rebirth complex, the traditional Buddhist view of personhood, and redefining Nirvana—not as extinguishment and escape from the cycle of samsara, but as living harmoniously in righteousness—what remains of philosophical Buddhism? Stroud, when he introduces Adlerblum's observation about the Indian student finding Dewey's ideal of happiness more fitting for India than Nirvana (p.8), he doesn't directly tackle what happens to Buddhism when it rejects the very metaphysical presuppositions that originally gave rise to the Buddha's understanding of salvation. Stroud doesn't see that this may be the greatest proof of Ambedkar's pragmatism, not perhaps of the classical variety, but the Rortyan kind, as Ambedkar seems to be willing to transcend all descriptions, textual, historical, philosophical to reshape the religious views, and thereby the social identity of, first his followers, and then Indian people at large. This might indeed be one of the most radical attempts in Indian history through imaginative redescription by one individual, trying to expand the ability of a society to redescribe the suffering of the Dalits and the Shudras (and by extension all oppressed classes) in a way that generates and cements empathy and solidarity. Re-inventing a religious tradition, i.e. Buddhism, which also suffers from the Karma-rebirth conundrum and pressing it as a tool for achieving moral and social progress is one of the best examples of how human thought, as well as human nature, "is contingent and changeable", the first hallmark of Ambedkar's pragmatism. (p.239-40)

Ambedkar on Nationality

Stroud's archival research into John Dewey's lectures offers valuable insights into the philosophical milieu that B.R. Ambedkar was exposed to during his time at Columbia University. By reconstructing what Ambedkar might have heard from Dewey regarding individualism, collectivism, and the role of the nation-state, Stroud aims to illuminate the potentially felicitous influence of Dewey's

conception of nationhood, with its cross cutting cleavages and progressive possibilities. However, while this archival work is commendable, it does not guarantee that Ambedkar assimilated Dewey's progressive ideas into his writings about nationhood. In fact, a close examination of Ambedkar's works reveals that Dewey's framework finds little to no uptake in Ambedkar's considered writings on the issue, which suggests that, in this case, despite having access to progressive views of nationality, Ambedkar consciously chose a more reactionary stance.

While Ambedkar was undoubtedly exposed to Dewey's lectures advocating for the nation-state as a facilitator of individual freedom and moral development, his own writings reflect a starkly different viewpoint. Ambedkar adopts an essentialist perspective, particularly concerning Hindus and Muslims, viewing them as inherently distinct nations rooted in deep-seated historical and religious conflicts. For Ambedkar the nationalistic sentiments prevalent among both Hindus and Muslims act in a centrifugal motion, blowing both communities farther and farther away. Perhaps, although he doesn't say it explicitly, the Dalits are the only segment of the Hindu people which, being a part-apart and on account of their near-constant servitude to the Hindus, are less conducive to enable a Hindu nationalistic self-conscious. As between Muslims and Hindus, Ambedkar sees them as essentialized categories, sometimes using the word 'race' to define them. For Ambedkar, the conflict between the Muslims and other minorities with the Congress was not based on whether the Congress has benefited these groups or not. The core of their disagreement lay on a completely different question - whether, after Independence from British rule, Hindus were to assume the role of a dominant ruling class, with Muslims and other minorities relegated to subordinate positions. The assumption is that in the event of elections, Muslims and Hindus will vote as if like corporate bodies, with an overwhelming, if not whole vote going to their coreligionist candidate. Of course, Ambedkar is not alone in this essentialist corporatized view of groups. Ambedkar is merely continuing to employ the categories proliferated by the Muslim league, a body initially populated by Muslim landed interests, the *ashraaf*. Stroud spends many pages discussing Ambedkar's exposure to Dewey's exposition of the development of nation in Kant, Hegel and Fichte. Yet again, these ideas have no real uptake in Ambedkar's writings. Rather, Ambedkar seems taken by Ernest Renan's notion of the nation as a "spiritual principle" which is a different, almost reactionary intellectual trajectory. He leverages Renan's ideas to argue that Hindus and Muslims lack shared historical experiences of pride or sorrow, thereby reinforcing his argument for their existence as separate nations. As to what really constitutes a nation, Ambedkar quotes Renan's proposal, who viewed a nation as a living entity, characterized by a spiritual essence. This essence is comprised of two intertwined elements. Firstly, it involves the collective ownership of a rich legacy of shared memories. Secondly, it encompasses the present-day consensus, a collective desire to coexist and maintain the integrity of the shared heritage passed down through generations. "The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, and sacrifices, and devotion." The legacy left by ancestors is supposed to have shaped the current identity of a nation. Factors like a heroic past, notable figures, and authentic glory serve as the foundation upon which a national identity is built. The essence of a nation lies in having shared triumphs in history and a united determination in the present, a history of achieving remarkable feats together and the ambition to replicate such achievements in the future. (BAWS Vol. 8, 61) Ambedkar is quick to jump to reactionary conclusions. In the logic that would influence his historiography as well, it is a foregone conclusion that Muslims and Hindus have no historical antecedents which they can be said "to share together as matters of pride or as matters of sorrow" (BAWS Vol. 8, 60). Ambedkar thinks that moments of violence and suspicion over many centuries attains a kind

of ontological significance that no amount of cultural and social coexistence and conversation can heal, for there exists a fundamental difference between the two: "In the religious field, the Hindus draw their inspiration from the Ramayan, the Mahabharat and the Geeta. The Musalmans, on the other hand, derive their inspiration from the Quran and the Hadis. Thus, the things that divide are far more vital than the things which unite" (BAWS Vol. 8, 62). We are told that to rely on shared aspects of Hindu and Muslim social life, such as common language, race, and country, is a fundamental misjudgment by Hindus, who mistake these accidental and superficial similarities for core and fundamental commonalities. In reality, the deep-seated political and religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims create a divide that is far more profound than any superficial commonalities can bridge. We see that Stroud's characterization has underplayed the extent to which Ambedkar's conception of nationhood was shaped by immediate political realities rather than philosophical instruction, as in this case where Ambedkar's support for the partition of India is driven by his assessment of insurmountable religious and cultural divisions (arguable), and not by Dewey's ideals of creative reconstruction of social identities. Ambedkar's pessimism about overcoming religious divisions and his belief in the inevitability of conflict between Hindus and Muslims stand in contrast to Dewey's faith in the transformative power of education and democratic processes. The deeper value of Stroud's archival work, therefore, lies not in establishing a direct influence of Dewey on Ambedkar's thought but in highlighting the philosophical alternatives that were available to him. Recognizing that Ambedkar had access to Dewey's progressive views but chose a different path allows for a deeper understanding of his intellectual journey.

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