

Digital Feminism and the Continuing Relevance of B. R. Ambedkar's Feminist Vision

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Abstract

The growth of digital technology has significantly transformed feminist activism in the twenty-first century. **Social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, online journalism, and digital storytelling** have become powerful tools for raising awareness about gender equality and women's rights. These digital spaces allow individuals to express their views, share experiences, and challenge patriarchal norms that restrict women's freedom.

In India, many feminist discussions are closely connected with the ideas of **B. R. Ambedkar**. Ambedkar strongly believed that the progress of society depends on the progress of women. Through his writings, speeches, and social reform movements, he advocated for women's education, dignity, and legal equality. His role in drafting the Constitution of India ensured that women can avail fundamental rights such as equality before the law and protection from discrimination.

Today, feminist activism increasingly appears in digital spaces. Social media campaigns, online journalism, feminist blogs, podcasts, and cinema have created new ways of discussing gender justice. Many of these contemporary feminist voices continue to draw inspiration from Ambedkar's philosophy of liberty, equality, and social justice.

This paper examines the relationship between Ambedkar's feminist vision and modern digital feminism. By analyzing examples from literature, cinema, social media activism, podcasts, and digital journalism, the study demonstrates that Ambedkar's ideas remain highly relevant in contemporary feminist discourse.

Keywords: Digital Feminism, Feminist Vision, Women's Emancipation, Dalit Feminism, Gender Equality, Social Media Activism, Social Justice.

Introduction

Feminism is a social and political movement that seeks equality between men and women in all areas of life. It challenges traditional structures that restrict women's opportunities and limit their freedom. Feminism as a movement first emerged in the Western world, especially in Europe and America, where it mainly focused on issues such as women's right to vote, education, and legal equality. However, early Western feminism was largely shaped by the experiences of white, middle-class women and did not fully represent the struggles of women from other parts of the world.

Because of aforesaid limitations, Black feminism emerged in Afro-American context, highlighting that women experience oppression based on both race and gender. Thinkers like Bell hooks and Alice Walker emphasized the idea of double oppression or jeopardy. An important

cultural expression of Black feminism is seen in *Blues music*, where Black women expressed their pain, despair, survival, resistance, endurance and everyday struggles. *Blues* became a space for healing and soothing mental traumas, as women shared their lived experiences through music. This expression was almost inevitable, as marginalized women created their own voice when formal platforms excluded them. In due course of time, such forms evolved into pop, rap, and spoken word, continuing feminist expression in modern culture. Thus, *Blues*, which were part of folk music in the past now have transformed into new ones which are easily accessible on the internet. This accessibility via digital platforms contributed to make *Blues* universal which ones were relegated only to African peoples reach. These developments made Black feminism more inclusive and global. In the present era, this tradition continues through digital feminism, where social media platforms provide a space for women to express their experiences, raise awareness, and challenge inequality in a modern digital form.

In the Indian context, feminism developed differently. Indian feminism is closely connected with social reform movements, colonial history, caste system, and cultural traditions. It does not focus only on gender but also on caste, class, and social inequalities. Early reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Savitribai Phule, and Jyotirao Phule played an important role in improving women's conditions through education and social reform.

In India, the struggle for women's rights has been shaped by several thinkers and reformers. Among them, B. R. Ambedkar occupies a unique and powerful place. Ambedkar believed that women's emancipation was essential for social progress. While addressing the Second All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, he stated: "*I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.*"

-(Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 17, Part 3, p. 282)

This statement clearly shows his deep commitment to gender equality. He strongly supported women's education and encouraged women to participate in social and political life.

Ambedkar also attempted to transform the legal structure of Indian society. One of his most significant efforts was the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill, which aimed to provide women equal rights in property, inheritance, and marriage. Although the bill faced strong opposition at the time, it later influenced several legal reforms that improved women's rights in India.

By the second half of the twentieth century, Dalit feminism emerged as a powerful critique of both mainstream feminism and caste-based oppression. Dalit feminism highlights that Dalit women face multiple layers of discrimination based on caste, class, and gender. It draws inspiration from Ambedkar's ideas of equality, dignity, and social justice, and emphasizes the need for an intersectional approach to feminism.

In the present era, feminist activism has expanded into digital spaces. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube allow individuals to share ideas, raise awareness, and build movements around social justice. This new form of activism is often described as digital feminism. This paper explores how digital feminism reflects and continues the feminist ideas of Ambedkar in contemporary society.

Defining Digital Feminism

Digital feminism refers to the use of digital platforms such as social media, blogs, podcasts, and online campaigns to promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal structures. It is a form of

activism that operates through the internet and digital communication technologies, enabling individuals to express their opinions, share personal experiences, and mobilize collective action.

Unlike traditional forms of activism, digital feminism allows for greater accessibility and participation. It gives voice to marginalized communities, including women from different caste, class, and regional backgrounds. Campaigns like online movements against sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and violence have gained global visibility through digital platforms.

Digital feminism also plays a crucial role in spreading awareness, educating people, and creating solidarity among individuals. It challenges stereotypes, questions social norms, and promotes intersectional understanding of gender issues. In the Indian context, digital feminism often intersects with caste, class, and regional identities, making it a powerful tool for social transformation.

Ambedkar's Feminist Vision

The feminist philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar was closely connected with his broader struggle against caste discrimination and social inequality. Ambedkar argued that caste hierarchy and patriarchy together created a system that oppressed both marginalized communities and women.

In his influential work *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar criticized social practices that maintained inequality and prevented social mobility. He believed that true social reform required the destruction of oppressive structures that denied human dignity.

Another important text is *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women*, where Ambedkar analyzed the historical decline of women's status in Indian society. He argued that patriarchal interpretations of religious traditions had contributed to the reduction of women's rights and independence.

Ambedkar believed that education was the most powerful instrument for social transformation. His call to "*Educate, Agitate, Organize*" encouraged marginalized communities to challenge injustice and demand equality.

Three major ideas define Ambedkar's feminist vision:

1. Education as the foundation of women's empowerment
2. Legal equality through constitutional rights
3. Social dignity and independence for women

These principles continue to influence feminist movements in India today.

Dalit Feminism and Ambedkarite Thought

Dalit feminism highlights the intersection of caste and gender oppression. Dalit feminist scholars argue that the experiences of Dalit women cannot be understood only through mainstream feminist frameworks.

One important scholar is Sharmila Rege, whose work *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* emphasizes the importance of Ambedkarite thought for feminist theory.

Dalit feminist literature also provides powerful narratives of women's struggles. For example, Urmila Pawar in her autobiography *The Weave of My Life* describes the experiences of Dalit women and the influence of Ambedkar's movement on their lives.

Similarly, Baby Kamble in *The Prisons We Broke* presents a vivid account of caste oppression and the awakening of Dalit women.

Another important writer is Meena Kandasamy, whose works address caste discrimination, gender violence, and resistance.

These literary voices show how Ambedkar's ideas continue to inspire feminist thought and activism.

Cinema and Feminist Narratives

Cinema has become an important cultural medium for discussing women's empowerment. Many films portray women challenging patriarchal expectations and asserting their independence.

The film *Bandit Queen* depicts the life of Phoolan Devi and highlights the intersection of caste and gender oppression.

Films such as *Lipstick Under My Burkha* and *Pink* explore themes of autonomy, consent, and personal freedom.

Similarly, *Queen* and *English Vinglish* portray women discovering confidence and independence in their lives.

The sports drama *Dangal* and the crime thriller *Mardaani* present strong female characters who challenge traditional gender roles.

The recent film *Mrs.* explores the emotional struggles of a married woman questioning societal expectations.

In addition, the documentary *Writing with Fire* follows women journalists from Khabar Lahariya who report on gender and caste issues.

The short film *My Choice* of Deepika Padukone also promotes the idea that women have the right to make their own life choices.

These films collectively represent the changing image of women in contemporary society.

Digital Feminism and Social Media Activism

Digital media has created new opportunities for feminist activism. Social media platforms allow individuals to share experiences and organize movements for gender justice.

The global campaign *#The MeToo* movement encouraged women around the world to speak about harassment and discrimination.

On Instagram, many feminist pages actively create awareness about gender equality and social justice. For example, *Feminism in India* shares research articles and news related to feminism, while *The Indian Feminist* focuses on activism and public discussions. Similarly, *Womanistan* highlights societal issues affecting women, and *Feminist Flower Crown* encourages people to question and unlearn patriarchal ideas.

Another initiative is *Dalit History Month*, which spreads awareness about Dalit leaders and social reformers.

YouTube, Podcasts, and Digital Education

- Digital platforms such as YouTube have also become important tools for spreading feminist ideas.
- The channel **Dalit Camera** documents voices from marginalized communities and highlights issues related to caste discrimination and women's rights.
- Similarly, **Brut India** shares short videos on social justice and gender equality.
- Podcasts such as **The Intersectional Feminist Podcast** discuss gender issues, caste discrimination, and feminist theory.

These digital platforms help spread awareness about equality and social justice among younger generations.

Constitutional Rights and Women's Freedom

One of the greatest contributions of B. R. Ambedkar is the constitutional framework that guarantees equality and freedom to all citizens. The Indian Constitution ensures equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender. These rights allow women to pursue education,

employment, and personal independence. Because of these constitutional protections, women today can express their views openly, participate in public life, and challenge injustice.

In many ways, digital feminism represents a continuation of Ambedkar's struggle for liberty, equality, and social justice.

Conclusion

Digital feminism has transformed the way feminist activism takes place in modern society. Through social media, blogs, podcasts, cinema, and digital journalism, women can raise their voices and challenge discrimination. The ideas of B. R. Ambedkar remain deeply relevant and the centre of these movements. His emphasis on education, equality, and social justice continues to inspire feminist activism in India.

From Dalit feminist literature to digital campaigns and cinematic narratives, Ambedkar's vision of women's empowerment continues to influence contemporary society. Therefore, digital feminism not only reflects modern struggles for gender equality but also continues the intellectual legacy of Ambedkar's feminist vision.

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